

PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN RAJASTHAN  
( 1920-1949 )

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Dr. Brij Kishore Sharma

Pointer Publishers  
JAIPUR-302 003 (INDIA)

*Distributed by*

**Aavishkar Publishers' Distributors**

807, Vyas Building, Chaura Rasta

Jaipur 302 003 (India)

© Author

ISBN 81-7132-024-4

Rs. 220.00

**Jodhpur University Library**  
Doc No 227387 Sub. Sci  
Ser. No 7131.2

*First Published in 1990 by*

Mrs Shashi Jain

**Pointer Publishers**

S M S Highway

Jaipur 302 003 (India)

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*Printed at*

**Anuj Printers**

26, Ramgali 8, Rajapark

Jaipur 302 004 (India)

*Dedicated to my  
Father  
Late Shri Kanhyan Lal Sharma*

## PREFACE

In the two decades the study of peasant movements has become the main focal point for the historians of the modern Indian socio-economic history. There has been a steady stream of works on this topic in the form of research articles, theses and books. The Marxist scholars mainly developed this field of study in its initial stages. To-day it has become a subject of common interest.

Studies on peasant movements have been conducted both at micro and macro levels. The micro studies are mainly concentrated at regional, district or village levels due to their inherent limitations. The macro level studies on the other hand only present an overview of the peasant movements though in an integrated manner. Significant macro studies in the field include, among others, Sùkhhbir Chaudhary's *Peasant's and Worker's Movement in India-1905-1929* (1971), A. R. Desai's edited volume on *Peasant Struggles in India* (1979), Sunil Sen's *Peasant Movements in India* (1982). All these studies did not, however, take account of the various facts of the peasant movements of Rajasthan. Only passing references were made to the peasant movement in Rajasthan in the works of A. R. Desai and N. G. Ranga. Ranga, in his article entitled "Indian Peasant's struggle and achievements" thus outlined the rise and growth of Rajasthan peasant movements, "Then rose the Jaipur, Gwalior and Udaipur peasants against their local Thakors and other feudal lords. They made use of the internal quarrels and contradictions between the states, princes and the thakors of Jaipur. They achieved victory on their economic front. The Udaipur revolt was put down cruelly. But forced labour had to be abandoned" (p. 80).

The present study entitled "Peasant Movements in Rajasthan (1920-1949)," seeks to fulfil the gap left by the above cited works. Though, some scattered works have been published

on the subject, they are inadequate and lack a historical perspective. The lapses of the previous works do require serious consideration and systematic analysis. An attempt has been made in the present study to balance the narrative and analytical aspects of the peasant movements in Rajasthan.

The peasantry in the former princely states of Rajasthan groaned under the weight of double exploitation of British imperialism and native feudalism. Beginning with 1920 the peasants were in revolt against their horrible conditions of life. The peasantry in Rajasthan had to pay a large number of *lag-bags* (cesses), custom duties and also perform *begar* (forced labour) in addition to paying heavy land-revenue which was half of the gross produce. The economic structure of Rajasthani society between 1818-1949 has been analysed in the present study and an attempt has been made to find out the level of feudal and colonial exploitation.

An important point of enquiry in this study is the analysis of the international, national and local events which encouraged the peasants to revolt in 1920 and thereafter.

It is an interesting fact to note that in the initial stages most of the peasant movements were spontaneous and were the outcome of social reform movements. In fact, the peasant movements in Rajasthan initially arose under the spell of social reforms and culminated into an economic struggle. The caste *panchayats* played an important role in the early stage of these movements. The caste organisations developed into class organisations during the peasant struggles.

During 1920-1938 Rajasthan remained a centre of anti-feudal and anti-colonial struggle in India. The role of All India National Congress in the above struggle was not appreciable. Apart from the active support the Congress did not even pass any resolution in support of peasant struggle in spite of various efforts of Bijai Singh Pathik, the leader of the Bijolia peasant movement. The matured mass movements of princely India compelled the Congress to adopt them as an integral part of their movements in 1938. In 1938 *Praja Mandal* movement arose under the influence of the Congress. The peasant movements of Udaipur and Jaipur provided a prepared ground for seeding the crop of

freedom struggle in Rajasthan. Between 1938-1949 the peasant movements and the *Praja Mandal* movement for responsible governments remained in close co-operation with each other irrespective of their class characters. This phase of the peasant movements has also been analysed in this study.

Chronologically the study has been divided into nine chapters. Chapter I and II are introductory which deal with the historical, geographical background and socio-economic structure of the society. Chapter III throws light on the early Bhil movements and the movement under the leadership of Govindgir. Chapter IV deals with the origin and development of peasant movement in Udaipur State, while Chapter V examines the Bhil movement under Moti Lal Tejawat. Chapter VI, VII and VIII investigate the peasant movement to in Jaipur, Jodhpur, and Alwar-Bharatpur States respectively. Chapter IX which forms the concluding part of the present study analyses and sums up the peasant movements in Rajasthan.

The study is primarily based on archival documents available at the National Archives of India, New Delhi, and Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner and its branches at Udaipur, Jaipur, Jodhpur and Alwar. Contemporary news papers and magazines have also been used as supporting material for the study. Besides, contemporary published material, Census Reports, Gazetteers, Administrative Reports, Settlements Reports, Famine Reports, Jagirdari Enquiry Report and various reports pertaining to social and economic conditions of peasants have also been scrutinised for the study.

I have got constant guidance and inspiration from my teacher, Prof Devendra Kaushik, School of International Studies, Jawahar Lal Nehru University, New Delhi. I am highly grateful to him for his help in the preparation of this work. I am also thankful to Prof. V. K. Mehta, Vice-Chancellor, Kota Open University for his continuous academic support and encouragement. It is also my pleasant duty to express my gratitude to my colleagues and friends Dr. G. S. L. Devra, Dr. Anam Jaitly, Dr. Shayam Gopal Sharma and Dr. Lila Ram Gujar of Kota Open University for their ungrudging help and encouragement, especially in discussing various intricacies pertaining to the study.

The authorities and Staff of National Archives of India, New Delhi, Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner and its branches at Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur and Alwar, Central Library of the University of Rajasthan and the ICHR Library, New Delhi deserve my grateful thanks for extending all facilities to me at different stages of my work. I am also thankful to the Indian Council of Historical Research for providing financial assistance to my project.

At a more personal level I am indebted to my wife Dr. Shail Bala and my daughter Samta without whose incalculable support and untiring co-operation this work would not have been possible.

Kota

—*Dr. Brij Kishore Sharma*



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## INTRODUCTION

The present State of Rajasthan was divided into 20 princely States before Independence.<sup>1</sup> All the 20 states were ruled by chieftain rulers, while the province of Ajmer-Merwara was under the direct rule of the British Government in India. 'The Agent to Governor-General in Rajputana was the overall manager of all the territory. It covered a total area of about 1,30,462 sq. miles.<sup>2</sup> Now it is the second largest state of India with an area of 1,32,300 sq. miles.<sup>3</sup>

The formation of the present Rajasthan took place in many stages, with the integration of above states and the province of Ajmer-Merwara. The first Union named *Matsya* was formed in Rajasthan on 17th March, 1948 with the merger of the States of Alwar, Bharatpur, Dholpur and Karauli.<sup>4</sup> The second Union of Rajasthan came into being on 25th March, 1948 with the merger of the States of Kota, Tonk, Bundi, Jhalawar, Dungarpur, Banswara, Pratapgarh, Kishangarh, Bhilapuri, Laxmi and Kumbhalgarh, which was also joined by Udaipur State on 18th April, 1948.<sup>5</sup> On 30th March, 1948 the States of Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bhikaner and Jaisalmer integrated in the Rajasthan union and with the merger of *Matsya* union on the 15th May, 1949 the state of Greater Rajasthan came into being.<sup>6</sup> The State of Bikaner, which had been attached to Bombay, merged in Rajasthan on 26th January, 1950.<sup>7</sup> Alwar remained in Gujarat and the Province of Ajmer-Merwara was conferred the status of 'C' class state, and both merged in Rajasthan on 1st November, 1956 under the Rajasthan State's Reorganisation Act, 1956. Thus, the present State of Rajasthan came into being with its present shape.

## I

**GEOGRAPHY**

The concept of geographical environment of a place denotes natural surroundings (the climate, soil, seas, mountains, minerals, rivers, flora and fauna, terrain, etc.) of a given society settled on that tract. The geographical factors had played an important role in the early history of mankind.

There is a trend which over-exaggerates the influence of geography on society and regards it as the ultimate cause of social development and social change. But this in no way conforms with facts. For instance Brazil is very rich in natural wealth, but it remains one of the most backward countries of the world. Again, countries within almost the same geographical environment display great disparity and uniqueness in their development. Vietnam and Thailand, located approximately in the same geographical conditions, stand at different levels of social development, the former is passing through the socialist stage of social development, while the latter is still languishing in the colonial phase.

Yet it cannot be denied that the geographical factors do exert a great deal of influence on the cultural, social and economic life or on social development, though their influence is never decisive. Therefore, the description of geographical features of the Rajasthan will be worthwhile.

**Location**

The Rajasthan lies between 23° 3' and 30° 12'N and 69° 30' and 78° 17' E. In the pre-independence period it was bounded on the west by the province of Sind; on the north-west by the Punjab State of Bahawalpur; and on the north and north-east by the Punjab. Its eastern frontier bounded with the United Province of Agra and Oudh and Gwalior State; while its southern boundary ran across the Central India and Bombay Presidency.<sup>8</sup> It may be useful to give roughly the geographical divisions of the several states of Rajasthan. The States of Jaisalmer, Jodhpur and Bikaner formed a homogeneous group in the west and north, while a tract called Shekhawati (part of the Jaipur State) and Alwar were in the north-east. Jaipur, Bharatpur, Dholpur, Karauli, Bundi, Kota and Jhalawar grouped together as the eastern and south-eastern states. Those in the south were Dungarpur,

Banswara, Pratapgarh and Udaipur with Sirohi in the south-west. The central part comprised of the British province of Ajmer-Merwara, the Kishangarh state, the chiefship of Shahpura and Lawa and parts of Tonk.

### Physical Features

The Aravali Hills intersected the territory almost end to end by a line running nearly north-east and south-west and about three-fifth of Rajasthan lay north-west of this line, leaving two fifth on the south-east. There were thus two main divisions-the area to the north-west and that to the south-east of the Aravallis. The north west comprising the states of Jodhpur, Bikaner, Jaisalmer and Shekhawati region covering an area of about 65,000 sq. miles, was a vast sandy semi-desert.<sup>9</sup> Water in this area was at a depth of 200 to 500 feet. Irrigation from wells was of course impossible and cultivation depended on fair rain, which was very much uncertain. The desert region always faced the problem of drinking water also. A little water was collected in small tanks or ponds during the rainy season to meet the need of potable water for the whole year. The second main division of Rajasthan, to the south-east of the Aravallis, contained the higher and more fertile regions.

In the north-western division of Rajasthan the only river of any importance was the Luni, which rose from the Pushkar valley close to Ajmer and flowed west by south-west for about 200 miles into the Rann of Kutch.<sup>10</sup> The south-eastern division had a river system of importance. The Chambal, the largest river in Rajasthan, flowed through the province for about one-third of its course. Its principal tributaries were the Kali Sind, the Parvati and the Banas. The last, which was next in importance to the Chambal flowed about 300 miles. It rose from the Aravallis near the fort of Kumbhalagarh and collected all the drainage of the South-eastern slopes of those hills as well as of the Mewar plateau. Its principal tributaries were the Berach, the Kothari, the Khari, the Mash, the Dhil, and the Morel. Further, to the north was the Banganga, which rose from Jaipur, flowed towards east through Bharatpur and Dholpur into the district of Agra and after a course of about 235 miles it joined the Yamuna. The Mahi, a considerable river of Gujarat, ran for some distance through Banswara and along

the border of Dungarpur in the extreme south.<sup>11</sup> In addition of the above, there were several small rivers and *nallahs* which flowed in rains. The rivers and *nallahs* could be used for irrigational purposes in a province where the water problem was acute. There were no natural fresh water lakes, the only considerable lake was the well-known salt lake at Sambhar.

Rainfall was very unequally distributed in the province. The following table shows the average annual rainfall (in inches) at five representative stations during the twenty five years ending 1901.<sup>12</sup>

<i>Station</i>	<i>Average Annual Rainfall (In Inches)</i>
Bikaner	11.06
Jodhpur	13.18
Udaipur	24.77
Jaipur	24.94
Mount Abu	59.26

To the above it may be added that the annual rainfall in the three eastern states (Bharatpur, Dholpur and Karauli) varied between 24 and 29 inches, in Kota and Jhalawar between 31 and 37 inches, and the town of Banswara got about 40 inches.<sup>13</sup>

The above data shows that the rainfall in the north-west was below the normal average while in the south-east it was normal. The limited availability of water was not used properly. The water of the seasonal rivers flowed uncontrolled and was wasted. Sometimes these rivers also created havoc by floods. The *Imperial Gazetteer of India* (Vol. XXI, p.93) mentioned this situation as follows "In years of excessive rainfall the rivers sometimes cause damage and loss of life. For example, in 1875 the Banas rose in high flood and, in its passage past Tonk town, is said to have swept away villages and buildings far above the highest water-mark. Again, the Banganga river, till it was brought under control in 1895 by means of several irrigation works constructed by the Bharatpur Darbar, has been responsible for much damage, not only in that state but in the adjoining district of Agra notably in 1873, when villages were literally swept away by

the floods, and Bharatpur city itself was saved with great difficulty, and again in 1884 and 1885."

The water of the rainy rivers could be controlled by constructing dams, tanks and *bunds*. The above measures would have brought prosperity to cultivators, but they were not pursued properly because the feudal set-up did not care much in this regard.

### Minerals of Rajasthan

Compared with many parts of India, Rajasthan may be considered as rich, if not in the quantity, at least in the variety of metals which it produced. Copper and lead existed in several parts of the Aravalli range. Copper mines were under operation mainly at Khetri, in Shekhawati, a province of Jaipur State. In Alwar State copper mines were at Dariba, Kushalgarh, Indawas, Pratapgarh, Baghani and Bhangarh. Some copper was procured in the range of hills between Lalsot and Nithar in Jaipur State, Gogra, Rajgarh and Rajauri in Ajmer, Kishangarh and Sirohi State. Lead mines existed at Ajmer, Jaipur and Jodhpur. Zinc and Silver mines existed at Jawar, near Udaipur. The other minerals were cobalt, iron, etc; however, the quantity of ore produced was very small due to inefficient mining process. The mines worked at small depths and mining below the water level was not possible as the elaborate machinery necessary for draining deep mines was beyond the means of the miners, if not beyond their mechanical knowledge. There were possibilities of the development of mineral industries but they were never explored.

In addition to above metals several varieties of building and ornamental stones were also available in Rajasthan. Limestone, sandstone, slatestone, marble, etc. were in abundance. The Makrana marble is of world fame. The Makrana quarries supplied the chief portion of the stone used in building the Taj at Agra, and the marble employed in decorating buildings in Northern and North-Western India was procured from the mines around Makrana.

The second remarkable stone was the limestone of Jaisalmer. Slabs were transported to Sindh and used for tombs. The red sandstone of Bharatpur, Karauli and Dholpur was equally important as the Mughal buildings in and around Agra and Delhi including the Red fort were built of this.

It is worthwhile mentioning that large natural stores of metal, stone and other minerals were available in Rajasthan. However, they did not become an alternative economic source to the inhabitants of Rajasthan where agriculture was poor.

## II

### **HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND**

The early history of Rajasthan is like that of the other parts of India. The archaeological excavation of Ahar (at Udaipur) established that there was a civilization in Rajasthan contemporary to Indus Vally civilization. During the Janpad period some parts of Rajasthan were in Matsya Janpad. Two rock inscriptions of Ashoka near Bairat in Jaipur State show that his dominion extended upto this place.

Between the seventh and the beginning of the eleventh century several Rajput dynasties arose in Rajasthan. In 1193 most of the parts of Rajputana were occupied by the Turks. In fact Rajasthani States were never independent and sovereign in nature. Their fate was linked with the central authorities from time to time. Whenever, the central authorities became weak the Rajput chiefs tried to become sovereign and independent.

During the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526) Rajasthan became an imperial province of the Sultans of Delhi. The chiefs of Rajasthan tried again and again to get freedom from the Sultans. The early Sultans of Delhi constantly pierced the province by rapid invasions, plundering and slaying to bring the province under their complete control. In the beginning of the fourteenth century, Ala-ud-din Khilji finally subdued the Rajput dynasties. The line of communication between Delhi and Gujarat through Ajmer has been usually open to the Sultan's armies and the Rajputs lost their freedom for a long time. In the beginning of the sixteenth century the Rajput strength revived as by this time the Sulnat of Delhi had weakened. Rana Sanga of Chitor arose as a powerful leader of Rajasthan.

The Rajput revival was short lived as Rana Sanga was defeated by Babar in March 1527 at Khanuwa. Akbar finally established Mughal dominance over Rajasthan. During the

Mughal regime Rajasthan remained peaceful and it made considerable progress during this period. After the death of Aurangzeb the Mughal empire became weak and the process of disintegration began. The Rajput states attempted to get free from the Mughal control. They also attempted the formation of an independent league for their own defence in the shape of a triple alliance between the three leading clans, the Sisodias (Mewar), the Rathors (Marwar) and the Kachhawas (Jaipur) but this league could not make headway in achieving the aim due to their inner contradictions on various issues.

The decline of the Mughal power created disorder in Rajasthan. After 1720 a series of wars and quarrels took place among the states of Rajasthan and the nobles. This state of affair created anarchical conditions in Rajasthan. The period of anarchy and disorder resulted in the desertion of the economy of the province. The peasants went away leaving their lands. Tradesman, in dread of robbers and the unscrupulous and oppressive nobles, were afraid of carrying on their normal business. Trade and commerce declined alarmingly. Industry was in no better position.<sup>14</sup> Col. J. Tod's description of the situation in Mewar is worth citing. He writes that "the agriculturist, never certain of the fruits of his labour, abandoned his fields and at length his country; mechanical industry found no recompense, and commerce was at the mercy of unlicensed spoliation. In a very few years Mewar lost half of her population, her lands lay waste, her mines were unworked; her looms which formerly supplied all around, forsaken."<sup>15</sup>

In the period of anarchy and disorder the Marathas penetrated into Rajasthan. In fact in the initial stage the rulers and nobles hired the services of Marathas against each other in the power game. The Marathas took full advantage of the situation and they became the real master. Rajasthan, morally and militarily debased, became the hunting ground for the Marathas. The Marathas and their associate Pindaries looted and plundered the province many times. The Rajput states made promises for payment of large sums to the Marathas and Pindaries, an obligation which was not possible for them to fulfil, and in case of non-payment or irregularities in payment these states became the



victim of anger of the Marathas. Whenever the states of Rajasthan tried to get free from the clutches of the Marathas they were defeated repeatedly and their territories were devastated. The Poona Residency correspondence recorded a statement of a French Military adventurer Pillet which throws light on this as follows : "Their country (Jaipur) having been devastated and depopulated by the armies (Maratha) which eat up their produce, although immense, has destroyed all the branches of commerce which made it flourish, and has left for their subsistence only what escapes the activity of these armies. Nearly 25 years of such calamities leave their ruinous effect to be easily judged."<sup>16</sup> By 1803 all Rajasthan, except Bikaner and Jaisalmer states, had been virtually brought under by the Marathas, who exacted tribute, annexed territory, and extorted subsidies. The Imperial Gazetteer of India explains that "Sindhia and Holkar were deliberately exhausting the country, lacerating it by ravages or bleeding it scientifically by relentless tax gatherers; while the lands had been desolated by thirty years of incessant war."<sup>17</sup>

The states of Rajasthan were suffocating in the grip of the Marathas and they became very much anxious to join hands with the British to get free from them. It was only the rising power of the East India Company which could free them from the Maratha clutches and offer a milder yoke. It was in the very nature of these states that they could not retain their independence. The British were also free booters like the Marathas, but they were sophisticated.

### **British Paramountcy in Rajasthan**

Lord Wellesley (1798-1805) took interest in the Rajput-Maratha affairs to safeguard British interests in India. He wanted to curb the Maratha power in northern India. He planned mutual friendship with the Rajputs against the Marathas. He succeeded in his plan but after his departure from India the British policy towards Rajasthan changed and the Chiefs of Rajasthan were left to take care of themselves.

The political conditions of Rajasthan were worsening day by day. The Rajput states again became victim of the Marathas and the Pindaris. They were not only afraid of the Marathas and the Pindaris but there were several reasons which compelled them

to accept the British protection. The chiefs were also entangled in wars with each other on petty matters. The nobles were in rebellion against their rulers and the rulers wanted to crush them down with the help of the British. By 1817 the Maratha power began to decline and the British power rose in northern India. The states of Rajasthan could not survive independently which was in their nature. Lord Hastings (1813-1823) sought to impose British paramountcy in India for which suppression of the Marathas and the Pindaris was essential. He looked upon the Rajasthani States as his natural allies against the Marathas and the Pindaries.

Charles Metcalf, the British Resident at Delhi, was entrusted with the duty of negotiating alliances with the states of Rajasthan. Of the Rajput States (excluding Alwar whose treaty of 1803 continued) the first to conclude treaties were Karauli (November 1817) and Kota (December 1817) and by the end of 1818 all the states of Rajasthan joined the British through treaties.<sup>18</sup>

Through these treaties the States of Rajasthan came under the complete subordination of the British. In principle the external affairs of these states passed into the British hands and a nominal independence was given to the rulers in internal affairs. The British were empowered to interfere in internal affairs too. In fact the Rajasthani rulers lost their freedom and power but in the colonial interests their existence was safeguarded by the British. Now the rulers became responsible to the British instead of being responsible to their people.

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## CONDITIONS OF THE PEASANTRY

With the establishment of the British paramountcy in Rajasthan many economic and social changes took place. The masses fell into the colonial and feudal clutches of heavy exploitation. The rulers became much arbitrary in dealing with their subjects. They felt that their existence is due to the colonial masters, not due to the masses. The peasantry became victim of the new arrangement which took place in 1818. On the instance of the British, the Rajasthani rulers enhanced the amount of land revenue arbitrarily.

In most of the cases the tribute paid by the Rajasthani states to the British was not fixed permanently. In case of the state of Udaipur the tribute paid to the British was 1/4th of the total revenue of the state for the first five years of the treaty; it was fixed 3/8th of the total revenue after five years. Obviously, the enhancement in land revenue was also enhancement in the income of the Britishers.<sup>1</sup> The tribute paid by the State of Jaipur was also fixed in the same manner as follows :

First Year	Nil
Second Year	Four Lakhs
Third Year	Five Lakhs
Fourth Year	Six Lakhs
Fifth Year	Seven Lakhs
Sixth Year	Eight Lakhs

After six years eight lakhs of rupees were to be paid each year. But in case of enhancement in land revenue by more than forty lakhs, 5/16th of the total revenue was to be paid in addition to rupees eight lakhs.<sup>2</sup>

"The tribute provisions made with the British paved the way for enhancement in land revenue. After 1878 new land revenue settlements were made on the British lines to institutionalise the loot by the states. These settlements were not aimed at improving the agriculture and working conditions of the peasantry but their sole object was to collect more money. These resulted in the decline of agriculture on the one hand, and increase in poverty and indebtedness of the peasantry on the other."

Here it would be pertinent to discuss the land revenue system in the states of Rajasthan to study the peasant movements in right perspective.

### Land Revenue System

The land was divided into two main groups, viz. *Khalsa* and Jagir. The land under the direct management of the State (Darbar) was known as *Khalsa* and the land held by grantees, whether individuals or religious institutions, was known as non-*Khalsa* or Jagir. The proportion of territory under both the groups varied widely in different states. According to the Imperial Gazetteer, the proportion of the *Khalsa* and Jagir land in Jodhpur was about one seventh of the total area; in Udaipur, one fourth; and, in Jaipur, two fifth; where as in Kota it formed three fourth, and in Alwar and Bharatpur seven eighths.<sup>3</sup> In all, about 60% land was under Jagir and 40% under *Khalsa*.

### Land Tenures in Khalsa

In the *Khalsa* territory the *Darbar* was the landlord and the superior and final right of ownership was vested in that. The cultivators enjoyed <sup>347/1148</sup>tenancy rights only. The *Darbar* was empowered to eject the cultivators as the land finally belonged to it. The system of land tenures in the *Khalsa* area could be explained as follows :

### Biswadars or Bapidars

These were permanent tenures in the *Khalsa* areas. The holders of these were given occupancy rights which were hereditary. They enjoyed undisturbed possession of their holdings so long as they continued to pay the fixed rent. The peasant under these tenures enjoyed certain other rights. The land revenue was charged

on concessional rates and the land revenue once fixed could not be enhanced. All the trees and other natural products could be used by them without any restriction or additional payment. They could sell or mortgage their holdings<sup>4</sup> The peasants under the *Biswadari* or *Bapidari* tenure were very few but certainly they were privileged in comparison to others. The demand for such type of tenure was prominent during the course of peasant movements in all parts of Rajasthan. The status of *Biswadars* or *Bapidars* was higher and in some cases they were petty landlords who used to lend their holdings to the peasants on the terms and conditions fixed by themselves.

### Ijara System

This was a prominent system of land tenure in the eastern and south eastern states while it was in vogue more or less all over the province. It was also known as *Theka* (contract) or *Ankbandi*<sup>5</sup> Under this system the right of collecting land revenue of certain pargana or area was sold out by public auction to the highest bidder who was held responsible for the payment of amount so fixed in one lumpsum to the state. *Ijaradars* were supreme authority to let out the land to peasants on the terms and conditions fixed by them.

Those villages or areas which were leased to the general body of cultivators were called *Khami Izara*. The amount payable by them was usually distributed over the holdings either by the cultivator themselves or by the revenue officials.<sup>6</sup> In principle the cultivators were jointly responsible for their payment but in practice they held the land jointly and were severally responsible for their payment. Where the Tahsildar or Revenue officials managed the village directly because of its unsuitability for the *Ijara* the land was given to the individuals on *patta* or lease for a certain period.

*Ijara* system was continued more or less till 1949 but after 1920 the process of replacement of *Ijara* with *Ryotwari* was begun, on the one hand it was resented by the peasants and on the other it was not considered conducive to the state revenue.

### Ryotwari System

The rest of the land (other than *ijaradari*) was taken up by peasants who did not possess any tenancy right. At the beginning

of each *Fasal* (crop season) every peasant selected agricultural land in the presence of the headman of the village and revenue officials. The amount payable by the peasant was fixed annually. The term of such peasants terminated with the crop season.

### **Pahi Kashats**

The cultivators who had no culturable land in their own villages were allowed to take up land in other villages. They were known as *Pahi Kashats*.<sup>7</sup> The villagers were always opposed to such tenants as they preferred to have the advantage of grazing their cattle on the land which otherwise might remain fallow. The terms and conditions of *Pahi Kashats* were different from those of *Dehi*. They were charged with heavy amount of land revenue in comparison to *Dehi*. They were also not allowed to graze their cattle on fallow land. In case they grazed their cattle on such land they were required to pay higher rates for this.

The peasants in the *Khalsa* area except *Bapidars* and *Biswadars* had no right of ownership on their holdings and their position was tenant at will. The settlement operations which began in 1880 could not replace the tenure system. It was only after 1920 that some kind of security of land tenure to the peasants was given in the *Khalsa* area. The land tenure system left no incentives for the agriculturists; it only increased their poverty. Due to insecurity of land, the tenure peasants were unable to improve agriculture.

### **Land Tenures in Jagir**

The land held by the State grantees was known as Jagir. Before the British paramountcy the word Jagir was applied only to estates held by Rajputs on condition of military service. The Jagirs were also known as *thikanas* and the Jagirdars as *Thakurs*. The various tenures of Jagir were as follows :

#### **Jagir**

The holders of grants under *Jagirs* were the oldest and most numerous. The Jagirdar was the Thakur or lord who held Jagir by grant (*Patta*) of his chief and performed service with specified quota (*Tan*) of military. The land under their possession was

managed by them and the State had no right to intervene. During the British period their military importance was finished as the external affairs were transferred into the British hands. Though they continued to perform military services, the process of cash commutation was introduced after 1858. By the first decade of the twentieth century their military services were commuted in cash.<sup>8</sup>

### **Muamla**

The word *Muamla* means primarily an arrangement or settlement. This category of Jagir tenures claimed that these were conquered by the ancestors of the owners. These were not granted by the states.<sup>9</sup> The Jagirdars under this category accepted the overlordship of the State concerned on the condition of tribute or military service. During the British period these were tributaries.

### **Subejars or Istamarardars**

These were tributary grants for which there was no feudal service performed but only a quit rent was paid. The rent paid by them once fixed was not variable.

### **Bhumias**

Those holding on the *bhum* tenure were called *Bhumias*, and were mostly Rajputs.<sup>10</sup> They performed certain services, such as watch and ward, escort of treasuries, etc.

### **Inam**

*Inam* was a revenue free grant to a person in recognition of his services, whereas *Tankha* was the grant to a person in lieu of service rendered by him. *Udak*, *Bhog*, *Milk*, *Muafi*, *Sasan*, were generally charitable grants given in *Punya* and *Dharmada*.

The grantees were not cultivators themselves. They were landlords and rent receivers. These lands were not governed by the revenue rules existing in the *Khalsa* land of a State. These were managed by the landlords according to their will.

### **Assessment and Collection of Land Revenue**

In both the areas viz. *Khalsa* and Jagir the main system of assessment of land revenue was the *Batai* system. There were



various methods of *Batai*. *Seedha Batai* was a division of the grain after threshing by an earthen pot called *Mutka*. Another method of *Batai* was *lata* and *Kunta* under which the produce was estimated by the officials of the standing crop. The share of Jagirdars and the State varied from one half to one sixth of the gross produce.

The *Batai* system continued in the Jagir areas upto 1949, but in the *Khalsa* area it was replaced by cash rents fixed on the quality of land. The cash system was known as *Bhej* or *Jama* system.

In addition to the land revenue a large number of *Lag-Bags* (cesses) were also imposed upon the peasants. Some of these cesses were regular while others were occasional. The number of these was not fixed. In some states it was upto three hundred. The cesses such as *Sirana*, *Mulka*, *Kunsari*, *Gaon-Kharch*, *Karda*, *Batta*, *Kasar*, *Tulai*, *Parkhai*, *Nazarana*, *Dastur*, *Lata*, *Kunta*, *Sahanagi*, *Haq Patel Patwari*, *Kanungo*, *Choudhary* and *Kamdar*, *Paona*, *Bhum* were charged regularly with the land revenue.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to land revenue cesses there were many cesses on agricultural production, cattle breeding, goods transportation, natural products, cottage industries etc. The cesses related to agricultural production were charged on commercial crops such as cotton, opium, jute, sugarcane and oilseeds. *Nalvat* and *Naharbas* cesses were charged on irrigated land. *Pher*, *Kadbi*, *Tura*, *Goreka-ghas*, *Rajka* etc. were charged for the cattle owned by Jagirdars and the State cavalry. The cesses known as *Chheli Ginti*, *Unt-Ginti*, *Khuntabandi*, *Pan-Charai*, *Hansil Mavesi Johar*, *Hansil Charai*, *Guada* etc. were charged on cattle breeding. Cesses were also charged on the export and import of grain, fodder, live stock, seeds, fertilisers, agricultural implements, etc. which were known as *Lag Mapa*, *Virsa*, *Daghl Binsud*, *Arat*, *Chhapa*, *Zakat* etc. The cesses were also charged on the naturally grown grass, firewood, *gond* etc.

The above mentioned cesses adversely affected the agrarian economy. There were also some other cesses which may be grouped as social cesses. The cesses known as *Bagdam*, *Nata-Dharicha*, *Dhol Danka*, *Kansa-parosa*, etc. were charged from peasants on the occasion of marriage and death feast. The

Jagirdars also charged *Baiji-ka-hatkharh*, *Bhent* <sup>the</sup> *Mataji*, *Kunwarji-ka-Kalewa*, *Bhent-Holi*, *Diwali* and *Dashahara* etc.

The amount of these cesses sometimes reached a figure almost double of the land revenue. The economic burden upon the peasantry was unbearable. The rulers and Jagirdars were looting the masses for their pleasure. Peasants were also forced to perform *bagar*. The position of peasants was like that of a semi-slave—a situation which was worst than that in the medieval period.

Under the prevailing land revenue system the peasants had no land rights. The land revenue and cesses charged by the States and landlords were quite excessive. After paying the land revenue peasants sometimes could not save enough for his bread and to fulfil his domestic needs he was compelled to borrow money from the usurer money-lender.

The conditions of peasants were worse in the Jagir areas in comparison to the *Khalsa* area. There was no rule of law and the peasants were on the mercy of the Jagirdars. Most of the peasant movements arose in the Jagir areas.

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## BHIL - MOVEMENTS

The Bhils were the first to raise a <sup>revolt</sup> ~~rebellion~~ against feudalism and British imperialism in Rajasthan. The majority of Bhils inhabited the formerly States of Mewar (Udaipur), Dungarpur, Banswara and Sirohi of Rajasthan. The Bhil tribe was a peaceful community but the changes fostered by the British compelled them to be turbulent against the British and the feudal order. Before the British rule they were enjoying undisturbed forest rights. In 1818 the States of Mewar, Dungarpur, Banswara and in 1824 Sirohi concluded treaties with the British power. In 1818 the Bhil revolted in the Mewar State against the new order.

### Early Movement

On 13th January, 1818 the Mewar Government concluded a treaty with the British in which all the external affairs were handed over to the British. The British were also empowered to intervene in the internal affairs of the State in certain cases. Practically the British became the real master as the amount of tribute paid by the Mewar State to the British was not fixed, but a portion of revenue was to be taken by the British which was 1/4th up to five years and after that it was raised to 3/8th of State's revenue.<sup>1</sup> The rise in the State's revenue meant a rise in the Company's income too. Obviously, the British tried their best to raise the revenue of Mewar State.

In 1818 the Bhils in Mewar revolted due to various circumstances. First, with the treaty of 1818 the native forces were dissolved. The Bhils were also employed in the regular and

irregular forces of the State and Jagirdars and with the dissolution of native forces they became unemployed. Secondly, immediately after the treaty the internal administration of the Mewar State was taken over by the British Resident Col. James Tod and he tried to bring Bhils under his control. Thirdly, the Gametis (Bhil Chief) used to collect *Rakhwali* (watch) tax from the neighbouring villages of their settlements and a tax called *Bolai* (Safty) on the passage of goods and travellers.<sup>2</sup> Col. Tod in order to establish strong authority upon Bhils decided to take over the right of the above taxes from the Bhils. This became the immediate cause of the Bhil revolts. Therefore in 1823 the British troops were sent against them and they compelled the Bhils to surrender.<sup>3</sup> Though the Bhil revolt was crushed, but the British could not achieve permanent peace. Furthermore, the above British action created bitterness among the Bhils.

To combat the Bhils the British Government made some new arrangements. The general administration of the Bhil tracts was taken over by the British and an Assistant Political Agent was appointed to look after the administration. In 1841 under his command a Bhil Corps was raised for which the Mewar Government contributed Rs. 50,000/- annually.<sup>4</sup> The above army became a tool to crush the Bhils.

During 1881-83 the Bhils of Mewar again challenged the British and Maharana's authority. The reasons for this revolt are discussed below.

After the freedom struggle of 1857 the British Government took over the Empire from the East India Company and a number of administrative changes were introduced in the Indian States. These changes put a check on the rights enjoyed by the Bhils. They were not allowed to take any advantage of cultivation and natural products without paying taxes, which they were enjoying freely. The civil officers were treating the Bhils in a cruel and inhuman manner and were extorting money forcibly from them. The oppression of the Bhils reached such an extent that some of them were forced to sell their children to pay the State dues. There were also complaints of corruption among the civil officers.<sup>5</sup> The *Bania* and the money lender who were absent from the Bhil

areas, were introduced under the new system. They were also exploiting the uneducated and ignorant Bhils under the pressure of the English legal system.<sup>6</sup>

Under the pretext of administrative reforms many levies were imposed upon the Bhils. Custom check posts were established in the Bhil region, which raised the prices of consumer goods. New taxes were imposed on tobacco, salt and opium. Liquor distilling by the Bhils was prohibited.<sup>7</sup>

The British efforts to introduce social reforms among the Bhils also agitated them. The witchcraft (*Dakan*) practice was prevailing among the Bhils. Any woman suspect of being a *Dakan* was tortured and killed. The British authorities pressed the State to stop this practice. The Bhils considered it an attack on their beliefs. This generated suspicion in their mind about the British. The census operations started in 1881 in the Mewar State also agitated the Bhils. The Bhils thought that the census was conducted to recruit them in the British army. They also feared that through census operations more taxes would be imposed on them. Some of them thought that attempts were being made to wipe out the Bhil race.<sup>8</sup>

The anti British feelings were also a cause of the Bhil unrest. In fact their freedom was snatched by the British and they were put into strict authority of administration for the first time. During 1818-23 the Bhils were crushed by the British which also generated hatred to British among the Bhils.

Police atrocities upon the Bhils gave rise to Bhil revolts. In the first week of March, 1881 a problem arose in the village *Padona* on the Udaipur-Kherwara Road which gave rise to Bhil revolts. The *gameti* (Bhil Chief) of this village was summoned by the *thanedar* of Barapal to appear as witness in some land dispute. The *thanedar* of Barapal sent *Sawar* (Police Constable) to summon the *gameti*, who refused to go. When the *sawar* tried to use force he was killed by the Bhils. The *thanedar* reached the village with force and arrested the *gameti*. The *gameti* was tortured by police cruelly and put to death. The Bhils of Padona and Barapal attacked the police station and the *thanedar* was killed.<sup>9</sup> The Bhils became violent and they burnt down the *bania* shops and police

posts in the nearby areas. The Bhils of Tidi and Kotra also joined the revolting Bhils. In no time the revolt spread over other hilly areas of Mewar State.

The state and British forces were sent to crush the revolt. The forces could not succeed in rounding-up the Bhils due to operational difficulties in the dense forest. The Maharaja's personal Secretary Shyamaldas, who was accompanying the troops, entered into negotiations with the Bhil leaders.<sup>10</sup> The negotiation could not bring about the settlement because the British were not in favour of it as they were trying to supersede the state <sup>Chs</sup>envoy. At Rikhabdev British representative Col. Walter made settlement of peace with the *gametis* of Bhils. The Bhils were sanctioned concessions in respect of their forest rights and taxes. *applied*

The above early movements of the Bhils were spontaneous and generated in reaction to the new system. The British Government took various measures to check the Bhil activities in future. On the one hand they announced some concessions to the Bhils and on the other they established an efficient network of military and civil control of the Bhil areas. These efforts succeeded in keeping the Bhils peaceful for a long time in Mewar State.<sup>11</sup>

### **Bhil Movement Under Govindgir**

A Social reform movement among the Bhils was launched by a reformer known as Govindgir. He tried to uplift the moral and material life of the Bhils through social and religious preachings. The teachings of Govindgir awakened the Bhils and the social religious movement culminated into politico-economic revolt of the Bhils?

Govindgir was a *banjara* by caste of <sup>हिरा हिर</sup>Vedsa village in the Dungarpur state. He himself was a tenant cultivator. His poor economic conditions and the death of his wife and sons diverted him towards spiritualism and he became a *Sanyasi*. He became a disciple of *Sadhu* Rajgir of Bundi Kota *Akhara*. He established his *Dhum* (fire-pit) and *Nishan* (flag) in Vedsa village and started teaching spiritualism to the Bhils of the surrounding area.<sup>12</sup> The main teachings of Govindgir were as follows in his own words.<sup>13</sup> "At that time I lived among the poor submissive and wild people

Bhils, who had no idea of the creator. To those who came to my hut there I used to advise them to behave like savkars (higher classes) I showed them the path of religion and truth; and preached them to worship God; not to commit theft, adultery, deception, etc., not to cherish feelings of enmity with others but to regard all as the progeny of the same parent (the creator) and live peacefully with others; to follow agriculture and to maintain themselves; not to believe in Virs, Vantaras, Bhopas, etc. (i.e. Ghosts, witches, enchanters and other superstitious beings); but as a safeguard against them to establish *dhunis* and *nishans* and to worship these." The Bhils were also taught not to drink liquor and eat meat. He also asked them to take bath and worship God before taking food, commit no murders, practice no debauchery, not to be avaricious, to obey parents, not to give false evidence, have faith in God, not to worship thousands of Gods.<sup>14</sup>

1. Govindgir was activated by a sincere desire to reform the social habits and religious beliefs of the Bhils. Through his efforts the Bhils began to emerge from their old dark and uncivilised conditions. Therefore, the teachings of Govindgir were hailed as a gospel of freedom from the age-old socio-religious bondages and they came out of the state of inferiority complex. The Bhils were taught to consider themselves the equals of the higher Hindu castes who were even declared to be inferior in some respects, such as their alleged bad custom of prohibiting remarriage of young widows. The above feelings of Govindgir's panth (sect) are made amply clear by his own statement that "The Rajputs are so cruel that they kill their girls so that they may not give in marriage to others. The Rajputs do not allow their young widows to remarry and if these girls become widows in young age the sin of infant widowhood is on their head because they remain unhappy in that life and are miserable. No true Brahman is seen. The thread is now the only mark of Brahmanism and whoever puts it on is a Brahman. They are as sinful as Rajputs and their widows are also guilty of miscarriage."<sup>15</sup>

\* These ideas enlightened the Bhils and made them aware of their conditions and rights. These ideas also compelled them to think that they were kept in servile condition by their masters the *Rajas* and *Thakurs*. They were the owners of the land and ought to



rule over it. Therefore, this socio-religious reform movement was culminating in economic-political movement.

As a result of the above preachings and welfare activities, Govindgir's panth was becoming popular among the Bhils. His influence was increasing rapidly. In 1805 Govindgir established "*Samp Sabha*", an organisation to unite the Bhils.<sup>16</sup> The network of this Sabha spread over a large area. These activities alarmed the rulers, their officials and Jagirdars. They feared that Govindgir's influence might be employed to undermine and subvert their authority and they were all anxious to see these preachers go away from their own states. This attitude of the authorities generated reaction among the Bhils. Thus, gradually this movement was taking political colour. The numerical strength of the Bhils in the states and estates of southern Rajasthan and adjoining areas of Gujarat was as under.<sup>17</sup>

<i>States</i>	<i>Total Population</i>	<i>Bhil Population</i>	<i>% of Bhils</i>
Banswara	1,65,463	95,834	57.91
Dungarpur	1,59,192	74,229	46.62
Pratapgarh	62,701	20,934	33.38
Kushalgarh	20,005	17,100	77.70
Idar	1,68,557	70,312	41.71
Pol	3,959	3,365	84.99
Sunth	59,350	30,365	51.16

☞ The above data shows that nearly half of the population of these states was under the influence of Govindgir's movement. It was easy to rule over the ignorant, illiterate and uncivilised people but enlightened people could not be ruled without logic. The Resident of Mewar in his letter to the Agent to the Governor-General in Rajputana stated categorically thus : "The doctrines, especially is as far as (1) they raised the social aspirations of the Bhils and thereby made them less amenable to unquestioning obedience of the orders of the Rajput *Thakurs* and officials, and (2) tended to decrease the sale of liquor and thus affect the *Abkari* revenue of the States in which the Bhils reside."<sup>18</sup> The State officials started to eject the preaches of Govindgir's panth from

their territories. They were ill-treated by the authorities and they were forced to give up the *panth*. In some cases they were also forced to drink liquor<sup>19</sup> Their *panth* was insulted by tearing the *nishans* and putting out the *dhunis*. The Jagirdars and State of Dungarpur compelled Govindgir to leave their territories.

The indifferent attitude of the above authorities generated hatred among the Bhils and compelled them to take a political line against the authorities. "Govindgir preached crusade against the authorities to overthrow the oppressive rule and reestablish the Bhil power in Bhil tracts. Thus gradually the social religious reform movement assumed a distinct political colour." In 1908 Govindgir left Vedsa village of Dungarpur state and also the Bhil tracts of Southern Rajasthan

After leaving Rajasthan Govindgir started to work among the Bhils of the Idar and Sunth State (Gujarat) under the Bombay government.<sup>20</sup> There he remarried his brother's widow and became an agriculturist. He worked as a Hali cultivating labour of the Ukrel (a village) Thakur under the Sunth State, and then was a hali of Surpur (a village) also under sunth.<sup>21</sup> In fact he took over the cover of agriculturist to expand his ideas "Along-with his moral teachings he also created awakening among the Bhils regarding their natural rights and their exploitation and oppression by the States and Jagirdars. Govindgir worked for the cause of Bhil freedom from all types of evil. During his early days he established his net work in the southern parts of Rajasthan and after 1908 he also spread it in the adjoining areas of Gujarat. He explained the reasons for the miserable life of the Bhils."

Here it will be pertinent to <sup>Point</sup> explain the causes of the Bhil uprisings. By this time the traditional economy of the Bhils had been shattered and they were passing through a transitional phase. In the changing conditions they were not getting justice from their ruling masters. The grievances of the Bhils which compelled them to revolt under the leadership of Govindgir were as follows :

1. In the olden days, the *Bhils* lived in grass of wattle huts in the jungle, and just sowed a little maize in the rainy season. They mostly lived on hunting and natural products. In case of much hardship they used to loot the surrounding areas. Under the changing conditions a large number of them were

compelled to adopt agricultural profession and settled down as cultivators. Thus, they came under direct control of the British, native states and the Jagirdars. As they were living a free life they could not relish the feudal and colonial control.

The States and the Jagirdars were charging heavy land revenue from the Bhils. The most prevalent system of land revenue assessment was *Vaji* or *Batai* or *Bhagwari* (crop share). The share of the states and the Jagirdars was assessed under *latai* or *Kaltar* (rough estimates) system. Under this system crops were over assessed and in case of inability in payments the Bhils were beaten up and ill-treated by the authorities. The Bhils had got no land rights. The land belonged to the States and the Jagirdars and the Bhils were cultivating it as their tenants-at-will and were little better than serfs.<sup>22</sup> Obviously, the settled habits placed the Bhils at the mercy of the States, Jagirdars and their officials. Formerly oppression was met by flight, but during this time flight was not possible. The new arrangements with the Bhils also pushed them into the hands of the money lender. The land revenue system became a cause of the Bhil uprisings.

2. Another grievance of the Bhils was with regard to the forest products. The modern methods of forest administration prevented the Bhils from fetching the forest products. Though, the Bhils had adopted agricultural profession but they still relied much on the forest products. The ownership of Mhowa trees and the right to use wood for their houses and to trade in wood and bamboos and other forest products and to graze their cattle in the forest were some of the most valuable rights the Bhils owned. Through settlements the above rights were restricted by the States and the Bhils were not allowed to enjoy the above without paying tax.<sup>23</sup> During this period the prices of forest products were increasing. The States also increased the forest taxes upon the Bhils in arbitrary manner which caused discontentment among the Bhils. To some extent the Bhils were allowed to take wood for use as timber with the permission of the authorities. It was a general complaint among the Bhils that the authorities granted the permission with delay and in a harassing and humiliating manner. The above restrictions affected the economic life of the Bhils very adversely.

3. Forced labour (Veth-Begar) was prevalent in Bhil areas on a large scale which also discontented the Bhils. The Bhils were compelled to perform *begar* or *veth* by Jagirdars and state officials. They were employed without payment for cutting and carting grass. The Bhils were forced to cultivate the Jagirdar's land, to construct their houses etc. The state official took *begar* from them for carrying the baggage on head for escort duty, watch and supply of carts. The Bhils were also required to work as domestic servants in the houses of Jagirdars and state officials. The Agent to Governor-General in Rajputana in a letter to the Secretary, Foreign and Political Department, stated that "Under present circumstances the burden falls very unequally on the Bhil population. Village whose position on the main road or near big towns renders them peculiarly liable to *begar* have to bear an unduly heavy share of the burden and it often happens that even with a very light assessment the harassment from "Begar" is so great that whole villages are deserted and land thrown out of cultivation"<sup>24</sup> The Bhils were performing *begar* or *veth* since a long time but the teachings of Govindgir awakened them. The *begar* was based on the caste hierarchy and the lower caste people had to put with heavy *begar* duties. The Bhils were considered to be a low caste people. Now the Bhils were feeling that they are being subjected to exploitation by the authorities due to their lower social status. The social religious reform movement among the Bhils awakened them to fight against social injustice.

4. Defective *Abkari* policy of the states also agitated the Bhils and in course of time the *Abkari* or State monopolized liquor trade became a sore point with the Bhils. The small states chiefly populated by the Bhils including Sunth, Idar, Banswara, Dungarpur and Kushalgarh depended to a great extent on the liquor monopoly which forms 1/3rd to 1/6th of their gross revenue. The monopoly was given to contractors, among whom there was considerable competition. The states suppressed illicit distilling. The Bhils had enjoyed the right of making country liquor for a long time. The country liquor known as *maodi* was very popular among the Bhils which was extracted from *Mhowa* flowers. Now, they were prohibited to distil *maodi* by the contractors and state officials.

This was greatly resented by the Bhils. But under the influence of the reform movement the Bhils gave up drinking which threatened the states and contractors with heavy losses. For instance the sale of liquor in Banswara in October, 1913 fell from 18,470 gallon to 5154 gallon, and all the surrounding states were similarly affected.<sup>25</sup> In the year 1912-13 the gross revenue of Banswara and Kushalgarh was Rs. 2,50,000/- and Rs. 86,000/- respectively out of which Rs. 56,000/- was from liquor in Banswara and Rs. 31,000/- in Kushalgarh was from liquor.<sup>26</sup> The contractors and state officials forced the Bhils to drink and tried to crush the reform movement. The political agent for Southern Rajasthan States wrote to the Resident in Mewar, that "The contractors were the immediate sufferers. They and their agents no doubt did their utmost to stem the tide of their losses and in some places may have employed wrong or questionable means to induce the Bhils to revert to their former habits."<sup>27</sup> The liquor issue became a prominent point among the Bhils.

5. Ill-treatment of the Bhils by the authorities accentuated their sense of suffering and created great resentment among them. The Bhils were ill-treated by the State official, Jagirdars and their *Kamdars* in connection with land revenue, forest laws, *begar*, *abkari* matters, etc. In some of the States Jagirdars used their own police which dealt with the Bhils in a cruel manner. The Agent to the Governor General in Rajputana in his letter to the Secretary, Govt. of India, Foreign and Political Department, had written about the Jagir police in Banswara state. He wrote that "The question of the Jagir Police is a still more difficult one. In a state like Banswara where a large portion of the State is in possession of the Jagirdars the darbar is comparatively poor and, with all the calls on its small income it could not maintain a force of police sufficient in times of stress to control the whole state. The Jagirdars therefore keep up bodies of armed police. These besides their potential use to quell local bands of dacoits and rising of Bhils on a small scale, which in the present stage of their civilisation are chronic in times of scarcity and famine, and which are liable to occur even in ordinary times, are put to practical use as the tax collectors, warrent servers, collectors of forced labour, messengers, etc. This system may be said to be a part of the structure of the feudal system and can only be done

away with gradually, and it is important not to undermine or suddenly weakness the authority of the local Jagirdars.”<sup>28</sup>

✓ The Jagirdars of Banswara State exercised almost unlimited criminal powers over their tenants, who were mainly the Bhils. In this regard the Agent to the Governor-General further observed thus : “Ten years ago while the State was under administration (British administration) those powers were withdrawn and the principal Jagirdars were made Magistrates under the control of the Darbar Criminal courts. They still, however exercise complete civil jurisdiction over their tenants and no civil cases from Jagirs are heard in the State Courts except where one or both of the parties is a *Khalsa* subject.”<sup>29</sup> The police and civil administration subjected the Bhils to suppression, thereby creating resentment among them.

6. The immediate cause of the Bhil rising in 1913 was the social religious movement among the Bhils under the leadership of Govindgir. “The authorities took it as a challenge to their authority and they tried to suppress the social religious reform movement of the Bhils with strong physical assaults.” In reaction to the recent tyrannies of the states and the Jagirdars the Bhils united themselves to fight against them under the leadership of their Guru Govindgir. The above situation was explained by the Political Agent for Southern Rajputana State in his letter to the Resident Mewar. He stated that “It is abundantly clear that the seed sown by the Gurus fell upon soil ready to receive it; to account for which, we might expect to find either a general grievance among the Bhils due to a feeling of being neglected in an age when depressed classes are every where obtaining some recognition and better conditions of life, or a set of genuine specific grievances.” It is certain that bad reasons have nothing to do with the case. Recent years have been good for agriculture and this year Banswara had a rainfall of 55 inches with a record crop of cereals. The general conditions of the Bhils, also, has never before been better in the experience of all competent judges. The grievances we have been told of, except such as the old time grievance of *begar* (forced labour), and complaints against the tyranny of the feudal system generally, are all connected with and subsequent therefore to the spread of the reform agitation. There

are <sup>U</sup>allegations of robbery by the Police of their *Gurus* and *Bapas*; insults offered to their religion, such as the forcible removal of their *Dhunis* and flags on places of worship; pressure brought to bear on them by the police and other interested in the liquor trade; and the expulsion of their preachers from one State after another.”<sup>30</sup>

It has been already mentioned that in 1908 Govindgir left Rajputana and worked among the Bhils of Sunth and Idar states of Gujarat upto 1910 under the cover of an agriculturist. He awakened the Bhils of the above states and he was able to build up a mass movement of the Bhils in the Thikan Pal Patta under Idar State. The situation created by the Bhil movement compelled the Thakur of the above *thikana* to sign an agreement with the Bhils. Under this agreement the Bhils got some concessions. The above agreement was concluded on 24th February, 1910.<sup>31</sup> The terms and provisions of the agreement were as follows :

### AGREEMENT

To

The Dungri Girassia Bhils of Pal Patta

The dispute between us has been settled and the terms of agreement to be entered into are as under :—

1. I used to receive  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the gross *Vaje* (Share) of the summer and monsoon harvest; but as you object to it, I give you concession as under :
  - (a) As regards monsoon crops  $\frac{1}{5}$  of the net produce of corn will be levied henceforth.
  - (b) As regards summer harvest  $\frac{1}{6}$  of the net produce of corn will be levied henceforth.
2. Contribution at the rate of Rs. 3-4-0 per plough will be levied instead of Rs. 3-8-0.
3. A right called '*Kanya Chori*' (Bride Tax) will be reduced from annas 12 to annas 6 per bride (*Kanya*).
4. A right called '*Bachaka*' i.e. 10 pounds of corn per house from the produce of Mal and Maize will be abolished.

5. One *Mana* (a measure equal to 10 lbs.) of Maize will be levied in default of payment of 100 maize spikes per house.
6. The practice of receiving a bundle of uprooted plants of gram with ripe legumes per house from the produce of grams will be continued and in case of default, one *mana* of grams will be taken.
7. Free hold land granted to the persons through favour will be continued so long as the line is not extinct but the holders of such lands should remain on friendly terms with me.
8. The practice of giving ghens grain to the *mukhis* will be similar to that which was in force in the time of Jamadar Gulab Khan.
9. The practice of receiving wages in kind on account of estimate of crops and collection of *Vero* (tax) goods and rupce one on account of Nazarana from the *Mukhi* will be continued.
10. The practice of giving *Gugari*, i. e. remuneration to those who carry *Vaji* to the Darbar will be similar to that which was in force in the time of Gulab Khan.
11. There will be no undue harassment in recovering the arrears for which the leaders of the village will be held responsible.
12. The estimate of crops will be made in the presence of the *Mukhis* and *Matadars* (leaders of the village) and no undue pressure will be brought to bear upon them. If there be a difference of opinion in estimate, a superior will be appointed and his expenses will be borne by the party that will fail. The Estate will bear the expenses in case the Kalatru (a person appointed by the Estate to the estimate the crop) fails to make correct estimate and the tenant will be held liable for the expenses in case the *Mukhis* or the *Matadars* fail to make correct estimate. The expenses will be borne equally in cases in which both the parties fail. The number of persons appointed as supervisors will not exceed two per threshing ground.



13. Sisodia Kalusinguji Navalsinghji will not be allowed to interfere in revenue matters.
14. No tax will be levied on the mango trees which are in their possession and the Mahowra trees which are in their compound. Dried wood of such Mahowra trees will be taken by Estate.
15. The rates of the price of *Vaji* grain will be fixed by me; but in case of necessity I am not bound to receive the *Vaji* in cash.
16. Labourers who will be called on special work will be paid at the rate of annas two per diem. This rate will vary in the case of children. The wages will be paid in cash and nobody will be pressed to accept corn in lieu of cash.
17. A *Mamu* will be a measure which will contain 10 seers of maize.
18. The right called *Sukhadi* will be continued in the upper as well as the lower patta and 4 seers instead of 6 seers will be taken as *Sukhadi* from the villagers of Amadra, Mohobatpura, Laxmanpura, Dadhawan and Samaiya as a special favour.
19. The right of taking service such as watching, errand by turns, etc. will continue.
20. I have a right to take *veth* (forced labour) from the Damores of Dadhawan. Up till now they did not get anything as remuneration but henceforth a piece of land will be given rent free to each house in consideration for their services. The area of such land will be equal to one which will allow ten seers of grain to be sown therein.
21. I pardon the five ringleaders Nanama Kodar Soma, Pandor Kala Dewjee, Kharadi Jiwa Kushga, Nanama Sankla Dhula and Kala Dhula-who took prominent part in submitting a petition in English to the Idar State against me.  
I pass this agreement as a special favour to my subjects.

AMNAGAR

(Sd/-)

PRATHI SINGH

Dated : 24th Feb., 1910

Thakore of Pal

The above agreement encouraged the Bhils to fight the age-old feudal exploitation. This was a clear indication of their power that they won through their efforts. The above success was the result of Govindgir's movement. Now the social religious reform movement took economic-political character.

Govindgir remained in the Bhil areas of Gujarat up to 1910. In the beginning of 1911 he again came to his native place Vedsa in the Dungarpur State. There he established his *Dhuni* and started preaching on modern lines in which he preached not only religious ideas but also about the freedom of the Bhils from feudal and colonial exploitation. He also established *Dhunis* in the villages of the Bhil centres. Every new *Dhuni* was guarded by *Kotwals* appointed by Govindgir himself<sup>32</sup> Through these activities Govindgir built up a parallel government. The *Kotwals* appointed by him were not merely religious heads, but they were also in charge of their concerned areas in all respect. They also used to settle the disputes among the Bhils.

Vedsa became the centre of Govindgir's activities. The Bhils from Idar, Sunth, Banswara and Dungarpur States and Panchmahal and Khera districts used to come to Govindgir. The influence of this movement was engulfing the Southern Rajputana States and British areas of Bombay Presidency. In April 1913 Govindgir was arrested by the Dungarpur Police and all his belongings were attached and the Police threatened to make him swerve from religious faith. His family was also placed under police custody. Within three days of his arrest he was released from prison and advised to move out of Dungarpur territories. He accordingly moved about April, 1913 into Idar State to a village called Rojada.<sup>33</sup> Here the Raja of Idar also attempted to arrest him.

"The harassment met by Govindgir and his followers compelled them to establish the Bhil Raj and liberate themselves from the clutches of feudalism and colonialism." Govindgir replied to persecution by inciting his followers against the states and Jagirdars and claimed protection from them. He planned to establish a Bhil State. From Idar State he moved with followers to the hill of Mangarh on the border of Banswara and Sunth States.<sup>34</sup> The hill was surrounded by thick and formidable forest,

so it was naturally protected. He and his followers formed a defensive position, which they provisioned and roughly fortified on this hill. The choice of this hill was no doubt influenced by the fact that it was situated close to the Mahi river which formed the boundary of the former Dungarpur state and thus the gathering might be able to move in the direction of Banswara, Dungarpur, Sunth, Idar, states and other adjoining areas. Govindgir reached on the Mangarh hill in October 1913 and messengers were sent out to collect the Bhils on the hill.<sup>35</sup> They brought with them large supplies of provision and arms. It was rumoured that the Bhils would attack the state of Sunth on 25th October, four days before the Dipawali. In fact, the hardcore followers were asked by Govindgir to come on the hill. These followers before leaving for Mangarh alerted the Bhil pals to be prepared for armed action against the authorities. A section of the assembled Bhils was to be remain on Mangarh to protect the main *gaddi* of the Bhil *Raj* under the leadership of Govindgir and the other section was to disperse in their areas to lead the revolution with the instructions and blessings of their Guru.

On 30th October, 1913 the Police Inspector of Sunth ordered the Jamadar of Police Yusufkhan and constable Gul Mohammed to go towards Mangarh and endeavour to find out what was going on. The two policemen accordingly went out on the 31st October. These two policemen were seized by the Bhils and one was killed and the other was severely beaten with tongs and kept prisoner at Mangarh.<sup>37</sup> On 1st November, a part of the Bhils attacked the Sunth fort of Paratapgarh but returned without success.<sup>38</sup> These developments alarmed the states of Sunth, Banswara, Dungarpur and Idar. All the states approached their concerned British officers to suppress the Bhils who were in a rebellious mood. Between 6th to 10th November, 1913 two companies of the Mewar Bhil corps, one company of 104th Wellesley's Rifles, one company of 7th Rajput regiment and a machine gun detachment of the 7th Jats regiment arrived to suppress the assembly of the Bhils on Mangarh hill.<sup>39</sup>

The forces marched through the troubled areas to create terror in the minds of the Bhils and ultimately the forces encircled the Mangarh hill by 10th November, 1913. Flocks of Bhils were moving towards the hill from various directions. The forces

compelled them to return to their villages. Many innocent Bhils were killed by the forces to terrorise. The forces created blockade around the hill. The Bhils who had to return accelerated their efforts to prepare for revolt, but without the orders of their *Guru* they could not do much. They were cutoff from their *Guru* and the blockade created by the forces broke their communication with the Mangarh hill. On the morning of the 10th November, the commissioner, Northern division (Bombay Govt) went towards Mangarh with a small force escort and was turned back by an armed party of Bhils.<sup>40</sup> The forces reached relatively closer to Mangarh and the British officer tried to meet Govindgir by shouting loudly. On 12th November a deputation of the Bhils came down the hill and handed over a letter containing a statement of their grievances and conditions of agreement. The letter sent by Govindgir was suggestive of the Bhil Raj.<sup>41</sup> The conditions presented were very much revolutionary in nature.

During the discussions, the British officers<sup>42</sup> told them that they were in sympathy with their reform movement, but it was rebellion to assemble in army in such a large number and to fortify themselves on a hill. The Bhil deputation was told that they should first disperse and return home and only then their grievances would be redressed. The Bhil deputation pressed their grievances and made clear that they were not prepared to submit before the authorities. Both the parties were adamant on their stand, so they could not reach any agreement. The British officers gave them a written promise signed by the Political Agent, Rewakalhtha, the Superintendent, Hilly tracts, and the Political Agent, Southern Rajputana States, to the effect that their religion would not be interfered with and that instruction to this effect would be issued to all states and districts. The British officers then departed after arranging a meeting on the next day. The letter written by the officers was as under :<sup>43</sup>

"We have received your application and are very glad to see that you have left off drinking liquor, committing *dackotties* and thefts and other vices and have taken to religion. We will never force you to drink liquor or ask you to do the above mentioned bad things. We would also issue orders to every state that they should not compel you to commit these sins, but we cannot tolerate your gathering in such a large number with arms in

one place. If you wish to worship, you can do anywhere, but we do not approve of your assembling in such a large number. We will send our troops on to the hill tomorrow. You are, therefore, warned that before daybreak you will all come down the hill and if any remains on the hill he should not fight. If he does so, he will be killed."

The above letter was full of threats to the Bhils on Mangarh but it could not succeed in discouraging them. The efforts of the British officers to induce the Bhils to get down the hill without any blood shed were continued. But along with the peaceful efforts military preparations were also continued. There was a great possibility of military attacks on Bhils. Again on 14th November Govindgir sent a letter written in a philosophical tone to the British officers. Here it will be interesting to reproduce this letter <sup>44</sup>

The humble request of the applicant Sanyasi (ascetic) Govindgirji Rajugarji, belonging to the Dashnami Panth (a religious sect of Sadhus) originally inhabitant of Vansia-Vedasa (villages) under Dungarpur but now living on the Mangarh Hill on the Sunth Banswara border is as under :—

Formerly I had built a hut in the village of Vedasa (in Dungarpur) and lived there with my family. At that time I lived among the poor, submissive and wild people, e.g. Bhils, Kolis, etc., who had no idea of the Creator; and I maintained myself by begging handfuls of flour (from those people). To those who came to my hut there I used to advise to behave like savkars (i.e., the higher classes). Through the Providence of the Almighty (i.e. as prearranged by God in some of our former births) those people Nugaras (wild) as they were, expressed desire to be made Sugaras (i.e. civilised) and to have me as their Guru (priest). I thereupon undertook to preach these people of Vedasa and surrounding country and made them my chelas (disciples). I showed them the path of religion and truth; and preached them to worship God; not to commit theft, adultery, deception, etc., not to cherish feelings of enmity for others but to regard all as the progeny of the same parents (the Creator) and live peacefully with others; to follow agriculture and to maintain themselves (thereby) not to believe in Virs, Vantaras, Bhopas, etc. (i.e. ghosts, witches, enchanter and other superstitious beings); but as a safeguard

against them to establish Dhunis (firepits) and nishans (flags) and to worship these; I asked them that those who were my disciples should wrap round their heads yellow coloured safas (Fetas), should wear rosaries of Rudraksh (beads of different sizes resembling the seeds of berries and produced in Nepal) round their necks; should not carry dangerous weapons such as swords, rifles, bows and arrows etc. but only iron tongs; should bathe and wash themselves every morning, should not kill animals of any kinds. In this way I preached them the path of truth. These people found all that to be so good and easy (i.e. acceptable and practicable) that the number of disciples went on increasing; so much so that at present there are about four or five lakhs of people among whom this (Bhakti) creed has spread. This is well-known to your honour. Though it was a custom of long standing with our sadhus to take Rs. 1-4-0 (one and a quarter) as Bhekh and Bana (i.e. presentation and earnest money) from each person at the time of admitting him as a disciple, yet I stopped it and began to take only Rs. 0-1-3 (one and quarter anna) from each person for admitting him as my disciple. In the meantime the officials of these Rajas misinformed their Rajas to the effect that this Bava (meaning myself) is a pretender and is looting (i.e. deceiving) the ryots. The Rajas through egotism and arrogance of their position (kingdom) did not inquire into the truth (or otherwise) of the report and the Raja of Dungarpur arrested and imprisoned me all of a sudden; attached my (little) saving out of begging and threatened me very much to make me swerve from my religious faith; so much so that my wife and children were also placed under police custody. But the Creator is the Protector of Truth and so my Lord helped me in getting released from imprisonment after three days. I ran away at once from that place and repaired to the village of Rojada in the Idar State where I lived (established myself) among the Banjaras of my caste. After I was there for some time, this religion spread there also and the Raja of Idar attempted to arrest me. I know that their intentions was to desecrate and molest the religious Bhakti (worship) which was preached by me; and I left that place; and in view of such constant great harassment I came to this intense and formidable jungle. No sooner did I enter this jungle than the Jemadar of the outpost of the Sunth State came there and instantaneously attempted to drive me away and made julum on me (harassed me). Then he ran away and (them) made a false report

that a free-booter bava (meaning myself) had come to the jungle and had burnt the Police Station in the frontier and killed a Jemadar. Without inquiry into the truth of falsity of this report, you were informed of this.

I then sent men to request the Sunth Durbar that out of the flags of Dhunis, tongs, Safas (Fetas), tamburas etc., which the Durbar had ordered to be confiscated in preventing my disciples from worshipping and which were lying in each of the Police Stations of the state those that were in the Khedapa outpost may be restored to me if not to those my disciples (from whom they were taken) and he would not mind the matter. But before my men entered (their premises) and without asking them any question (as to their object of coming) they were fired upon; and fourteen of my men were shot dead there and then. There are dead bodies of some of them still lying there if prompt inquiry be made about them all will soon be apparent to you. Inquiry will also show (to you) that others were wounded too. "Being in this way greatly harassed, I with my disciples have removed ourselves to this hill only with the object of saving our lives and worshipping (God) out of sheer fear." Now I submit that my disciples in Sanjeli, Kadana, etc. will be harassed as stated below and so I request that these our grievances should be redressed. "I am a poor and innocent Sadhu. I fly from place to place, being constantly harassed, to continue my Bhakti (worship)" You are the ruler of the four corners. (i.e. of the world) so your honour will (please) redress the following grievances :

1. In every village the firepits of my religious sect have been dug out and Mahomedans have been made to make water on them, tongs, safas, flags religious books, coconuts, etc. have been ordered to be confiscated by the Sunth State and are in the possession of the fojgars of the State. These should be ordered to be returned.
2. In all villages the firepits and flags of my religion should be reestablished as they originally were.
3. As before, people should be allowed to attend the fairs, to have right of (and pay respects to) the Dhunis and nishans (firepits and flags) on the new moon day, full moon day, the eleventh day and other holidays of the Hindus.

4. For me to erect a house to live in, the Kharaba land of this hill should be ordered to be granted to me.
5. The State (sarkar) should offer no interference with the income to be derived by me from the firepits and flags.
6. It should be arranged that the State should in no wise object to my disciples visiting my place of residence (the holy Guru Dwar—the door or residence of the priest).
7. Except the State no subordinate servants should be allowed to exact veth from my disciples and none should take from my disciples any thing cheaper than at the ordinary price.
8. All bribes taken by the State officers in connection with my religious faith should be ordered to be refunded to us.
9. Proper enquiry should be made as to the murder of my men without reason by the Thanedar of the fort (of Partapgarh) and I may be compensated for dishonouring me.
10. I have not appointed any body as the head of my disciples. But yet, some of my principal (respectable) disciples are suspected as being seditious such as Punja Dhirā; Patel of Dungar, and Patels of Batakwada, Partapgarh, Kyar, Bandara, Ghughas, Molara, Babari, Patwel, Aptalai, etc., so proper bandobast should be made so that after this matter has been settled the Sunth Durbar Saheb may not harass them on account of the above suspicion of sedition.
11. I should not be harassed or prevented from going with my disciples from village to village for preaching.
12. Free (Dharamada) timber should be granted from the reserved forest for erecting roofs over my Dhunis (firepits) in monsoon in every village.
13. Permission should be given to me to erect samadhis or deris (small temples) over the tombs of my two deceased sons who are interred at Molara village (as I intend to do).
14. Except the Raj (i.e. the Raja) the uncle of the Raja should not take veth from the disciples.
15. The Raja Saheb employs such persons as Dewan as he likes and passes harassing orders on the ryots. This should be but to a stop to; and the British Government should appoint



a Dewan of its own for the protection of the ryots and myself; such as the Parsi Dewan in the time of (the late) Maharana Partap Singhji, who (Parsi Dewan) fixed the vighoti (settlement).

16. For my protection, a battalion of 200 Bhils my disciples—with rifles should be employed by the British Government in the Sunth State; and permission should be given to me to retain 100 rifles.
17. My disciples should be paid at Rs. 2 per 1000 bundles of grass that they are made to cut for the State. At present people of Ratnpur Division are paid at Re. 1 and those of other village at Rs. 0.4 0 per 1000 bundles of grass cut by them. This should be put to stop to and they should be paid at the above rate.
18. Two men of Babrol who were my disciples have been prosecuted and imprisoned without evidence. The papers of this case should be sent for and looked into and they should be released.
19. My disciples have been forced to drink liquor; and food cooked on the Dhunis (firepits) has been polluted by sepoys. What is their object in such desecration ?
20. My disciples do the veth of the State. It should be taken from them in an equitable manner.
21. My disciples should not be prevented from putting on ornaments and coloured clothes necessary for their religious rites.
22. The security bonds of Rs. 500/- taken from my disciples for coming to me should be cancelled.
23. Punjo Dhirji, Patel of Dungar, is innocent and yet warrants have been issued to the police to arrest him. Again the Thanedar of Kherappa has reported falsely that he (Punja) burnt the Gadra outpost and killed a Jemadar. He (Punja) has not done any such thing. So he should be declared innocent and given immunity.
24. At present the State servants take their rounds in villages and threaten to arrest and beat my disciples. So their

rounds should be stopped and the Sunth Darbar should give assurance to them that they will not be harrassed and should be given immunity.

25. Darbar Saheb (i.e. the Sunth Raja) calls his children (i.e. his ryots) by salas (i.e. wife's brother). This being abusive should be stopped and the Rajas attachment to debauchery should be checked and he should be led to the path of religion.
26. Through fear of the State and of being murdered, my disciples have run away to jungles; and so their crops have suffered. The State should not increase the vero (land revenue), and should give remissions to those whose crops have suffered much. Civil suits and execution of decrees of Savkars should be postponed this year.
27. I appoint Sheth Gulabchand Hamirchand of Rampur as my Mukhtyar to come to me and obtain my replies and explanations. So the state should not object to his keeping such men as he wants; and proper bandobast should be made that no harassment is offered to him or to his men subsequently.
28. In making enquiries into the truth or falsity of all this, the servants and ryots of the Sunth State should not be allowed to mix (i.e. have a hand in it).
29. When the matter is settled a Tharav (document of decision) bearing your honour's seal and signature should be given to me.

The above are my and my disciples grievances. You are the sole lord (authority) to save us from them and to save the lives of the millions of people.

30. This ryot is of the Rajaji and yet they have to suffer a great deal in building houses. For, when they apply for free grants and timber for houses, they get them after about two years and that too insufficient (i.e. only sufficient to make a mala, i.e. a temporary shade on four posts erected in fields to watch crops). Moreover all intestate property (escheat) is taken by the State. Therefore the Mahalkari should

follow the old practice and give sufficient timber promptly. The prohibition to cut bamboos should be removed and the State should not take the intestate (escheat) property. Moreover opium sold at 4 bhars (tolas) for a rupee in Vaghad (in the adjoining territory) it is sold at 2 bhars (tolas) for a rupee here. There should be the same rate for opium here and in Vaghad. Firewood is the sole means for the poor people to protect themselves from cold. So that there should be freedom to the people to get dry firewood (i.e. there should be no restriction to people fetching fire woods from the jungle).

31. No interest should be charged (by the state) on Tagavi advances; the levies on fruit trees and fees on stones, chunam kankar should be done away with.
32. The vighoti (land revenue) fixed or to be fixed should be remitted on all land cultivated by the poor people; and the land revenue should be assessed according to the old custom. Ryots should be given permanent permits to keep swords and guns such as are given to the frontier people.
33. Our fair is to last for one month and a half and seven days more. So we sit quietly and repeat the name of the Lord. My residence is in the middle of two boundaries. Here we have facilities of water and firewood and so my disciples come here to pay their respects on the fair days such as the new moon and full moon. I have buried (i.e. forgotten) all my worldly miseries and have confined myself here; and yet my disciples have been subjected to harassment. You should be considerate and careful for what you do. On one side (our side) is the word (divine word); on the other (i.e. your side) is order (i.e. power or authority). One party (we) is vedi (i.e. knower of truth) the other party (your) is bhedi (i.e. practiser of all worldly activities). Speak out, sir, don't ask about (i.e. look to) our actions and it is not for us to ask about (i.e. to look to) the actions of the States. Pray don't intimidate the people; let them do their Bhakti (worship). They are all your ryots; if they do not obey your laws, tell me (i.e. I may be answerable for it) But if you will kill them while they are doing their worshipping,

you will have to answer for it before the Lord. I do not admit among my disciples (such persons as) the eaters of pigs and cows, drinkers of liquor, the greedy, the practisers (sic) of falsehood and deception, back-biters, thieves, liars, the debauched and such other doers of evil deeds Females of Banias, Brahmins and Rajputs become child-widows and then practise immorality. Can they be called Satis (chaste) or papis (sinners). These (Bhils) are poor people-worms of earth—they till land and throw a handful of grain in it. A wallet and gourd (a beggar's all) is my lot and I accept that pleasantly. I want nothing and from nobody. I take from him who gives without asking. Therefore, pray do not harass me. I have a claim over nobody. In the month of Diwali (i.e. the last hindu month) I travelled to my garden (probably the hills) but even there have been harassed. The Thanedar of Idar, the Thanedar of Lunawada and the uncle of the Darbar, these asked for bribes from me; and as I did not give it to them, they said they would case themselves on my Dhunis (firepits) and kill fowls and goats in them and would molest my flag. So saying they came to arrest me and then through fear I have hidden myself in the Mangarh Hill. In this age of 'Kaliyuga' (Iron age) your Empire is on the full swing; so you should tender justice to us and discriminate milk from water and save the lives of crores of living beings. The authorities in Sanjeli have burnt away my flags; the Sunth Darbar practiced great julum on us. I have completed six years of my worship and six more are remaining. I shall meet you. You are great indeed—great as keeper of human beings within law—great as to keep kings and ryots within (the limits) of law. You Sarkars, are my Panch and my representative. I am to attack, kill or loot nobody. I am following my worshipping actions (i.e. religious rites). Because none of the States would allow me to live below (i.e. in the plains) and because they will molest me and my worship; therefore, I have taken myself to this hill for my own prestige. I am innocent. I (Govindgirji) am the disciple of Rajugarji, who was a disciple of Solagarji, who again was the disciple of Ghotagariji of the great Akhada (institution) of Bundi (a town in Rajputana) I am a

Sansari, i.e. worldly man (i.e. have my family) and I have children. Pray do not harass and injure me. Bhekh (begging) is the attribute or symbol of God Sankar. Have fear of the Lord. All have to die. (so) have some mercy and religious spirit. Do not practise fraud or false-hood on me. Do not attack me through anger. If my intentions be fraudulent towards the Raja or ryots, then let the very Bhekh the religion swallow me. And if you practise any fraud against me then let your religion swallow you. Let our respective religions swallow us (if we practise any fraud against each other.) He who digs a pit will fall into it. As one sows, so he reaps. As one acts so he reaps the fruits of his actions. You should decide all this and tender us justice and then go your way; otherwise your field will be spoiled (i.e. perhaps the whole affair will be spoiled). I am Guru of these people; there are three things for a Guru (Priest): to raise these people (from their wild habits), Guru mantra (some sacred formula to be communicated by the Guru to all disciples and to be constantly repeated by the latter), the word of Guru. I have with me nothing else, no pretensions or deceptions. I rely upon the name of the Lord. I have accepted the one (divine) Word (as true); I have faith in the Bhekh (life of a beggar) which is the attribute to symbol of God. You are great. Pray do not throw a five-seer weight (i.e. a heavy weight) on an ant. Sooner or later all have to go (i.e. to die). Righteousness will be lasting, the Divine Word is the protector of Jogis' righteousness. I trust your word and then if there is any breach of trust in this, then we will fight till death and my children will be in a helpless condition. If you will annoy the Bhagats (my worshippers) it will not have good results. Here in my place of residence every morning as many as one thousand Sadhus are fed. To meet this expenditure, you should ascertain and fix the amount of my lagat (levy) of Bhekh (alms) i.e. fix the rate of which I should collect my dues from all communities. I appoint the following persons on my behalf to settle this matter in obedience to your honour's orders :—

1. Seth Sarafali Salemanji of Rampur

2. Mehta Chhaganlal Punamchand of Rampur.
3. Vanjara Lakha Jivan.
4. Paragi Gendal Jorji of Batakwada.
5. Salji Jorji of Batakwada.
6. Munia Teja Gala and Munia Punja Gala of Garadu in the Jhalod Taluka.
7. Vanjara Dudha Kashala

I appoint the above named persons as my mukhtyars to settle this matter. The above is the application of this poor Sadhu."

"I do not want to interfere with anybody. I do not wish to rule State, nor to plunder any town. I am sitting by the old Dhuni with my emblems of worship which I have found on this hill. I live on grain given to me by others. I do not commit theft nor advise my disciples to do so. If they do not observe my precepts there is no good of my being their Guru. All these people have assembled here out of regard towards me. You have been misled. You are not illiterate and you should not have come under the influence of others. What harm have we done that you are displeased. We are not thieves. The world is mortal. We only want grain to live and clothes to cover ourselves. We will be satisfied if you will simply allow us to observe our religion, faith, goodness, confidence and trust. Why have you come upon us with such a large force? You can rule. We are content with our religion. \*The Bhils have run away to the hills out of dread because they and their females have been insulted and dishonoured. They have been forced to drink liquor and eat buffaloes. The Guru was also disgraced. The Hindus and Muhammadans have forsaken their religions. Hindus have become atheists. We do not allow Muhammadans to eat flesh and drink. Muhammadans force us to eat beef and destroy our religion. For all these reasons we have gone to the hills as we are helpless. \*Rajputs are so cruel that they kill their girls so that they may not give in marriage to others. In the same way they have been so cruel towards the Bhils that they beat them without enquiring whether they are right or wrong. The Rajputs do not allow their young widows to re-marry, and if these girls become widows in young age the sin of infant widowhood is on their head

because they remain unhappy in that life and are miserable. The Sarkar is also to blame for this shortcoming. "No true Brahman is seen. The thread is now the only mark of Brahmanism and whoever puts in on is a Brahman. They are as sinful as Rajputs and their widows are also guilty of miscarriage. These three castes dare not come to us. The Muhammadans are infidels and take interest on money and eat boar's flesh which is prohibited in their religion. These people who are such infidels destroyed our worship. They do not like a religion which preaches good morality. You can judge whether it is good or bad. "For the sake of this worship we have sacrificed our wealth, family, grain, and everything and have taken refuge in these jungles for the sake of salvation either in this life or in next life. Our sin does not allow us to settle anywhere. You will ask these states whether we have committed any theft or murder. We have done nothing of the kind but only worship. We are Banjaras by birth. We are not so clever as the trading class. We are ordained to live by cultivation. Though we are worldly men we have taken to the hills as our religion is being destroyed. The following are Gosains (hermits) of Bundi Dasnami Akhada (hermitages) :

Giri Name

Chota Garji.

Salan Garji.

Raju Garji.

and this unfortunate Govind Girji. You can enquire from them by telegram whether this is a new religion or is spread all over the world ? The Bhils accepted me as their sad Guru, and I invited them seeing their true zeal towards me and they became my disciples. I enquired about their religious custom and settled with the Panch. We take you to be just and fair. Weigh justice and then kill us. The disciples have come to their Guru for Darshan (worship). If there be a fear of their doing any mischief they can bound down, under the village headmen's bond. The disciples will have to suffer the consequence of their past deed as the father for his own. The Guru's advice is that whoever observes religion will get salvation. For example, as you sow, so you will reap. He who does evil will suffer. As is your action, so is the consequence. We have come into this world to expiate the sins of our previous existences. The more evil we do in this world the

more we will suffer. We shall not have kingdom to rule by mere crying for it nor by force. None is master of our lives. I am here with full conception of my past deeds and live upon a handful of grain presented by the Bhil devotees in their jungle. If I and my heirs ever come down from the hill to loot a village let us be blown from the guns. I have full faith in my Creator who resides in (the ark of) my Dhuni. They (my disciples) are contented. Whatever little they get they distribute. If they get clothes they can put them on, if not they would kindle fire and sit thereby. They are not adulterous. They have given up all vices. We only work for our livelihood in this regard in the next. This worship is for the next life for, as Kabir (the Hindu poet) says, what we do will bear fruits some day or other (Some lines of poetry) our actions follow us and overtake us though we fly a hundred leagues away. The strong should not make a bad use of their power and you should not destroy our devotion (fakiri). You are the monarch of the country. In this iron age there is no justice. Sin will overtake you one day. Do not use force. Have some regard for our feelings. God will bless you. Do not harass people. Fire is burning in our heart. There is no one in the world to extinguish it; only you can do it. You are the guardian saint of our people. You are sensible people. We have "Guru Mantra" (incantations of Guru). Confide the word of a holy guru. Sooner or later we have to die. We may obtain salvation only through worship; do not destroy our religion."

✓ The States were requesting for an early removal of the Bhils from the Mangarh hill. For instance, the Dungarpur Chief wrote to the Political Agent, Southern Rajputana, about the gravity of the situation. He wrote that "The delay caused in your settling the Bhils is having a bad effect here. Bhils are gathering in Pals praying that the British forces will be defeated and Bhil Baba Govindgir will win as he has supernatural powers, and the delay is being caused because the sahibs are frightened of attacking the Babas. Unless you do something effective now, the Bhils here and I feel confident in Mewar and Idar will also give trouble. Excuse this letter, but I cannot let occasion pass without information. Bhils in Limrutara Pal are already giving trouble, and I am trying all I can to keep them quiet."<sup>45</sup>



On 17th November troops marched on Mangarh hill. Most of the forces took position on another hill in front of Mangarh where they set the machine gun. The forces fired from that hill and the Bhils tried to resist for one hour. But the Bhils could not resist and they started to run away to save themselves. The troops posted below Mangarh hill encircled the hill and started climbing up. Nearly 100 of the Bhils died and 900 were arrested.<sup>46</sup> Their main leaders Govindgir and Punjia, were captured. Punjia was the first who surrendered and induced the others to surrender. Both the leaders were immediately shifted to the Ahmadabad jail. Nearby eight hundreds were released after a week and others were kept in the Sunth Jail for trial.<sup>47</sup> The news of this incident spread over the Bhil villages which disheartened them. The troops returning to Ahmadabad, Baroda, Kherwara and Udaipur marched through the Bhil areas and created terror by shouting and shooting. Thus, the Bhil revolution was crushed mercilessly.

Though the revolt failed but it had far reaching effects. Mangarh hill became the symbol of the Bhil inspirations. The British officers imposed restrictions upon the Bhils to go to Mangarh hill either singly or in numbers for next two years without the written consent of the *Darbar* concerned.

Of the one hundred persons arrested, 30 were identified as ringleaders of the Bhil revolt. Twenty seven persons were tried by a special court constituted for this. Remaining 70 persons who were mostly *Mukhias*, *Patel* and *Gametis* (head of Bhil villages) were handed over to the states concerned where they were tried by a special courts. The 30 persons who were tried by a special court were charged with serious offences such as murder, banditry, spreading disharmony and class hatred and waging war against the States. The decision in this case was given in an arbitrary manner. ✓Baba Govindgir was given death sentence, Punjia Dhirji life imprisonment and others were given three years rigorous imprisonment. Out of thirty, six persons were let free from prosecution.<sup>48</sup> The special court mentioned above was constituted mainly by Political and Military officers as judges, which was unjustifiable. Here it will be pertinent to quote the judgement which was as under :

## JUDGEMENT

Without entering into unnecessary detail, the history of the movement which culminated in the rising of the Bhils in October and November 1913, and which was suppressed only at the cost of several lives, is as follows :—

Govindgir, a Banjara by caste, and a resident of Versa or Vedsa in Dungarpur State, has been engaged in the laudable task of improving the morals and habits and religious practices of the Bhils during 1912 and the early part of 1913. He succeeded in attracting to him as disciples (Chelas) so many of the Bhils, that the matter became notorious, and the Dungarpur Durbar became alarmed at the rapid spread of the reformed faith. The Dungarpur Police took action, and arrested Govindgir and his family. The arrest, however, seemed likely to cause an unexpected commotion amongst the Bhils and Govindgir was forthwith released, and advised to move out of Dungarpur territory.

He accordingly moved, about April, 1913, into the Idar State, to a place called Bela Rojda, where he stayed amongst his own class of Banjaras. Here according to Govindgir's own story, he was waited on by a deputation of Bhils who had collected at Salagra Mahadeo, in Banswara, just before the Dewali. Govindgir accompanied the deputation, and arrived at Mangarh Hill sometime in October, 1913. Messages were sent out to collect the Bhils at Mangarh, and very large number arrived, for the fame of Govindgir as a teacher had been noised abroad. Here the preliminary story ends, and the future proceedings formed the subject matter of the trial by the Special Court.

The Bhil gathering on Mangarh Hill assumed such large proportions that the neighbouring States of Sunth in the Bombay Presidency and Banswara in Rajputana become seriously alarmed. At the instance of the Banswara Durbar, the Political Agent, Rewa Kantha, was telegraphed to by the Political Agent, Southern States, Rajputana on the 18th October to secure the arrest of Govindgir, and this was followed by a vernacular letter, dated 18th October asking for the arrest of Govindgir (accused No. 1) and Punja (accused No. 2).

The Raja of Sunth was addressed by telegram on the 20th October.

On the 30th October the Police Inspector of Sunth ordered the Jamadar of Police Yusufkhan and Constable Gul Mohammed from the Gadra Post to go towards Mangarh and endeavour to find out what was going on. The two Policemen accordingly went out on the 31st October. They met some Bhils who seized and beat them so severely it is alleged that Gul Mohammed was killed. Yusufkhan was carried to Mangarh hill, where he remained a prisoner until November, 15th.

On the 1st November, an attack was made on the fort of Partapgarh, which was occupied by some fifteen Sunth Police and Thakurs. The attack was driven off, with a loss to the Bhils of at least one man. That the attack, whether premeditated or not, was a serious one, and well pushed home is proved by the fact that the gate of the fort was hacked by axes. On the other hand, no fire arms were used, although the Bhils on the Hill were well supplied with guns.

On the 2nd November, 33 men of the Rewa Kantha Agency Police arrived at Sunth to assist the Rajas' forces.

On the 2nd or 3rd November, the Bhils are alleged to have looted the village of Bhamri, the Patel of which refused to join the other Bhils on Mangarh.

On the 8th November, the Political Agent, Rewa Kantha, accompanied the Commissioner, Northern Division to Sunth and, on the 9th November the whole party accompanied by the District Superintendent of Police, Godhra, and 50 of the Agency Police proceeded to Partapgarh Fort. The same day, the Political Agent sent a letter to Govindgir and received reply. On the 10th November the Commissioner himself went towards Mangarh, and was turned back by an armed party of Bhils on the hill. He then telegraphed for a Company of the 104th Wellesley's Rifles from Baroda and Machine gun detachment from the 7th Rajputs from Ahmedabad.

On the 11th November, Major Hamilton, Political Agent, of the Southern States, Rajputana and Captain Stockley with the advance party of the Mewar Bhil Corps arrived. On the 12th Captain Stockley met some Bhils from Mangarh, who gave him a series of complaints against the Native states. On the same day, the Political Agent Rewa Kantha, received a long letter of 33 complaints and grievances against the Native States which he

demanding should be redressed. This letter was signed by Govindgir, and is shown as Exhibit 3-6.

On the 13th November, there was an alarm that the Bhils were about to attack pertabgarh fort, in which were the Commissioner and the political agent, Rewa Kantha.

On this day and on the 14th letters were written to the Bhils warning them to leave the hill and even promising them safe conduct to come and discuss matters. They were warned that the hill would be cleared on the 15th November.

On the 15th, orders were issued to clear the hill and the troops were actually in motion when the telegraphic orders of the Government of India were received giving the Bhils one more opportunity

That evening the Police Jemadar, Yusuf Khan, was released by the Bhils, but the postponement of the attack had the unfortunate effect of stiffening the resolution of the Bhils to hold the hill. On the 16th, warnings were again given to the Bhils and the hill would be cleared the next day by the troops, and on the 17th the force moved forward. The orders given to the Military Officer in Command were, to clear the hill with as little bloodshed as possible, to arrest Govindgir and Punja especially, and as many Bhils as possible for examination by the Commissioner. The orders were carried out thoroughly and expeditiously, and in the most human manner possible. The Bhils offered a fairly determined resistance for some time and then fled. The hill was found by our troops to have been well and recently fortified. One of the sepoys of the 104th was severely wounded, and several Bhils were killed and wounded, while about 900 were captured, including Govindgir and Punja. From the remainder, the headmen of the Bhils from the Dungarpur Banswara and Sunth States were made prisoners, while the others were released.

Finally, Govindgir, Punja, and four Sunth Bhils, all "Gametis" or head men, and twenty four "Gametis" from Banswara were brought before the Special Court. No accused belonging to Dungarpur were brought before the court, as it was stated that no "Gametis" from Dungarpur had been found amongst the Bhils captured on Mangarh.

The thirty persons brought before the Special court 1—Govindgir 2—Punja 3—Kalu 4—Kalji 5—Dharji 6—Surji 7—Halia 8—Gajahand 9—Kodar 10—Khuma 11—Ramla 12—Babaria 13—Vala 14—Kalia 15—Meha 16—Partabia 17—Jala 18—Bhura 19—Gajhand 20—Chamna 21—Bijia 22—Kanji 23—Hurji 24—Kura 25—Ranja 26—Tarasia 27—Suma 28—Khuma 29—Kalia and 30—Jotia were all charged with offences under sections 121, 121-A of the Penal Code in force in the States of Sunth and Banswara.

The following accused Nos. 17—Jala, 26—Tarsia, 27—Suma, 28—Khuma, 29—Kalia and 30—Jotia were acquitted on the ground that they were not "Gametis" and that there were no reasons for believing that they had taken a larger share in the disturbances than other persons, not being Gametis; at the suggestion of the Court, therefore the Public Prosecutor withdrew from prosecution of the above named six accused.

A further charge was also framed against Punja accused No. 2, under section 302 of the Penal code, charging him with the murder of Constable Gul Mohammed of the Sunth Police.

As regards the actual commission of the offence of waging war there is no possible manner of doubt. The accused persons were all captured by the troops on the actual field of battle, and they none of them deny their presence there. From the evidence before the court, both oral and documentary it is clear that the actual and titular head of the movement was Govindgir, accused No. 1, and he is undoubtedly responsible for the acts committed by the Bhils on Mangarh. Their war-cry was "Jai Guru Govindji" or "Jai Govind Maharaj". He was believed by many to be a reincarnation of the Deity, and was treated as such by many of his ignorant followers. He had a guard of Bhils with drawn swords around him as he sat, or as he rode in State around the defences on the hill. The answers to the letters addressed to "The Leader of the Bhils on Mangarh" by the officers below are signed in his name, and with his consent; he admits that he was the "Baba" and the others were his "Chelas". He admits the authorship of the letter of 33 grievances and complaints which undoubtedly seeks to subvert the authority and sovereignty of the two states of Sunth and Banswara. In this document, he makes demands as from one ruler to another.

Finally, Govindgir pleads guilty to the charge framed against him, and admits his responsibility for the acts of his followers.

As regards, Punja, accused No. 2 he pleads not guilty to the charges of waging war and murder. For the first, he claims that he was drugged by accused No. 1 and entirely under his influence. From the evidence, however, the Court is convinced that Punja, accused No. 2, played a very large part in the movement. He acted as secretary for Govindgir, (who is illiterate), and some of the principal documentary evidence is in his hand writing. He is repeatedly referred to in both oral and documentary evidence as Govindgir's right hand man and lieutenant. He took a principal part in the capture of the Police Jamadar and Constable, was recognised by two witnesses as taking part in the attack on Pertabgarh Fort, and by other witnesses (especially his own uncle, witness No. 21 for the defence) as being on the Mangarh hill during the time the Bhils were assembled there.

Accused Nos. 3 to 6 admit that they were on the hill knowing that the order to disperse the assembly had been given by the Political Officers. They all say they were on the hill for three days and desired to go down on the 15th, when the Police Jamadar was released; but that they were forcibly restrained and placed in the stocks. This statement, even if true, shows that they joined the assembly on Mangarh on the 14th some days after the arrival of the troops and at a time when the orders for the dispersal were wellknown.

The remaining accused Nos. 7 to 16 and 18 to 24 all admit having gone to Mangarh and having stayed various periods from one night to four, though only one accused (No. 9) admits having been there so long as four days. They call evidence (see witness No. 15 for Defence) to state that they were prevented from leaving the hill with him, and he himself left the hill on the 13th November?

We cannot believe the witnesses called for the Defence to prove that all these accused were forcibly restrained from leaving the Hill. The witnesses were relations or friends of the accused for whom they appeared and came forward in succession with practically the same story monotonously

told: It is improbable that just these particular persons out of thousands should have been subjected to physical compulsion.

A further general defence has been put forward that Govindgir (accused No. 1) had threatened that those Bhils who did not join the assembly or who, having joined it, should leave the Hill, should be consumed with fire or die of disease. We cannot give any weight to such a defence. Indeed no form of compulsion, not even the fear of instant death, is an adequate defence against the charge under these sections.

We find that Govindgir Bechargar (accused No. 1) and Punja Dhirji (Accused No. 2) are guilty of having waged war against the States of Sunth and Banswara and thereby committed an offence under Section 121 of the Penal Code of Law in force in those States. We sentence Govindgir Bechargar to be hanged by the neck till he is dead. This sentence is subject to the confirmation of the High Court specially appointed in connection with this trial. The second accused was the first person on the Hill to lay down his arms when called upon to do so; and also was of great use in inducing others to do so and so preventing further bloodshed. Taking this circumstance into consideration we sentence this accused Punja Dhirji to undergo transportation for life.

We further order that all the property of the accused persons Govindgir and Punja within the limits of the Sunth or Banswara State be forfeited to the respective State in which it is.

The remaining accused are illiterate and ignorant persons, under the spiritual domination of their Bawa Govindgir. All the rest of the 900 Bhils captured on the hill have been released and these men are being prosecuted only as Gametis or Headmen. They are nearly all oldish men and there is nothing to show they took a prominent part in any way. We do not think it reasonable that the penalties attaching to the graver charge should be inflicted on them. We reduce the charges against them to charges under Section 148 and 149 of the Penal Code. These persons all voluntarily became or remained members of an assembly obviously unlawful and after they knew that it had been ordered to disperse. It is impossible to suppose that any Bhil in the neighbourhood was ignorant of the arrival of the troops or the purpose for which

they had been sent for. They must have known that with a very numerous force of armed Bhils on the Hill, the advance of the troops was likely to be resisted by force of arms, each one of these accused there is clearly liable to the punishment for rioting armed with deadly weapons, laid down in Section 148 of the Penal Code.

Under that Section and Section 149 we sentence each of the accused :

- Kalu Rawaji, (No. 3)
- Kalji Lalji, (No. 4)
- Dharji Koyala, (No. 5)
- Surji Jetha, (No. 6)
- Halia Dhania, (No. 7)
- Gajahang Alia Rajhand Jita, (No. 8)
- Kodar Vahaljidar, (No. 9)
- Khuma Nagjida, (No. 10)
- Ramla Narjida, (No. 11)
- Babaria Nathia, (No. 12)
- Vahala Bhudia, (No. 13)
- Kalia Dhana, (No. 14)
- Mecha Hamjida, (No. 15)
- Partapia Babran (No. 16)
- Bhura Johuda, (No. 18)
- Gajhand Dhola, (No. 19)
- Chamna Galia, (No. 20)
- Vijiya Fuljida, (No. 21)
- Kanji Nagjida, (No. 22)
- Hurji Lhudia, (No. 23)
- Kura Vagji, (No. 24)
- Ranga Mavaji, (No. 25)

to undergo rigorous imprisonment for three years.

The further charge of murder has been framed against Punja Dhirja (accused No. 2) alone. The evidence shows that on the 31st October, Jamadar Yusaf Khan and Constable Gul Muhammed were ordered by their superiors to reconnoitre the



Bhil position on the Hill. Both were captured by the Bhils. The Jamadar was taken up the Hill and kept there as a prisoner till the 15th November. The Constable was never seen again. His uniform belt (identified by the buckle No.) was found on the Hill after the action. His heirs have performed the ceremonies usual after the death of a relation although his body has not been found we are satisfied that his death on the 31st October is proved. There are scores of places on the Hill where a body might be hidden until taken off by wild beasts. As to the manner of his death there is only one eye-witness (Ex. 12) the Jamadar Yusuf Khan. We see no reason to disbelieve his evidence. His manner impressed us favourably. The rest of his story, apart from some not unnatural embroidery has been amply corroborated. There appears to be no motive to impel him to accuse Punja falsely. The accusation of Punja is not a late invention, because on that very night, the 31st October, the Police received information that Gul Mohammed had been murdered, and that Punja, was concerned in his death. When the Jamadar was brought down the Hill his statement was taken at the first opportunity by the Political Agent, Rewa Kantha, and he then named Punja as having taken part in the crime.

According to the Jamadar's evidence, Gul Mohammed after being captured, was brutally beaten to death by Punja, his brother Pratap (who has absconded and has not yet been found) and two or three others, in circumstances which leave no doubt that the offence committed was murder as defined in the Penal Code.

In view, however, of the fact that the body of the Constable was never found, and as after all the case against Punja depends entirely on the statement of a single witness (who may conceivably be perjuring himself, though we have no reason to doubt his evidence) we do not think it proper to inflict the penalty of death for this offence.

Accordingly we convict the accused Punja Dhirji of murder and sentence him, under Section 302 of the Penal Code of Law in force in the Sunth State (where the offence appears to have been committed) to undergo transportation for life.

Pending the result of any appeal which may be made, all the accused are ordered to be kept in the Sunth Jail.

( (Sd) H. GOUGH, Major.  
Dated 11th Feb. 1914 :— ( (Sd) F.W. ALLISON.

The accused Govindgir is informed that if he wishes to prefer an appeal he should do so to the Commissioner, Northern Division, within seven days.

Sentence pronounced in open Court.

( (Sd) H. GOUGH, Major.  
Dated 11th Feb. 1914 :— ( (Sd) F.W. ALLISON.

### **ORDER FOR DISPOSAL OF PROPERTY**

To be handed over (except the documents exhibited) to the Sunth State for disposal.

( (Sd) H. GOUGH, Major.  
Dated 11th Feb. 1914 :— ( (Sd) F.W. ALLISON.

The above judgement was to be executed only after the confirmation of the High Court. The High Court was constituted at Ahmedabad with the commissioner, Northern Division (Bombay Government) as the judge. The judgement and appeals from the convicts reached the above High Court. The twenty three appellants were represented by Mr. Antaldas, pleader. The twenty-fourth convict died in Jail. On opening the case for the appellants, Mr. Antaldas raised the formal objection that the present Commissioner of the Northern Division is debarred from sitting as a high court under section 556 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. His objection was valid on the ground that the Commissioner, Northern Division, was himself a party as he was present during the military operation on Mangarh. The operation was conducted during his presence and under his instructions and supervision. The objection was over-ruled and proceedings were continued.

The Commissioner, Northern Division, sitting in High Court passed the following order "Under the provisions of section 423 of the Criminal Procedure Code I confirm the convictions of Govindgir Bechargar under section 121 of the Penal Code of law in force in Sunth and Banswara but alter the sentence to one of transportation for life. I confirm the convictions of Punja Dhirji

under sections 121 and 302 of the said code and decline to alter the sentence of transportation for life passed by the special court. I confirm the convictions of the 21 appellants under sections 148 and 149 of the same code but reduce the sentence passed on each of them to six months rigorous imprisonment".<sup>50</sup>

The above order passed was under the influence of prejudices. The Commissioner who passed this order was himself involved in the military operation on Mangarh against the Bhils. So there was no question of justice at his hand. The above officer was not fair in his decisions as he was bound with the interests of the British imperialism. In the era of National upheaval such type of activities were not tolerable by the blood-sucking imperialist. To put a check upon revolts, such types of steps were essential to protect the British Empire in India. The pleader for the convicts pleaded the case in a legal and logical manner based upon facts and leading cases. But the Commissioner passed the orders in an arbitrary manner. He did not take in considerations the points raised by the pleader for the convicts. Being an executive Officer his behaviour was prejudicial to justice. He supported his orders through fabricated jargons based on false stories. The reasons for those orders were as follows :<sup>51</sup>

1. For the trial of Govindgir Bechargar and others, accused of having committed offences in connection with recent disturbances upon the borders of the Rewakantha Agency and the Southern Rajputana States a Special Court consisting of Mr. F.W. Allison, I.C.S., and Major H.K.A. Gough was constituted under the Government of India's Notification (Foreign and Political Department) No. 699-D, dated the 2nd February, 1914. The same notification directed that the Commissioner, Northern Division, Bombay Presidency should, in relation to the proceedings of the Special Court, exercise the powers of a High Court.
2. On the 11th February 1914 the Special Court found Govindgir Bechargar and Punja Dhirji guilty of having waged war against the States of Sunth and Banswara and sentenced them, under Section 121 of the Penal Code of Law in force in those States, Govindgir to be hanged by the neck till he is dead and Punja to transportation for life.

They further convicted Punja of murder and sentenced him, under section 302 of the same Code, to transportation for life for that offence. The remaining twenty-two accused, viz. Kalu Ramji, Kalji, Lalji, Dharji Koyla, Surji Jeta, Halia Dhani, Gajahang alias Rajhang Jita, Kodar Vahaljidar Khoma Nagjida, Ramla Narjida, Barbaria Natha, Vahala Bhundia, Kalia Dhana, Melia Hamjia, Partapia Babra, Bhura Johuda (since deceased), Gajhang Dula, Chamna Falia, Bijia Fuljida, Kanji Nagjida, Hirji Bhudhia, Kura Vagji and Ranga Mawaji, have been convicted of rioting, armed with deadly weapons, and being members of an unlawful assembly members of which committed an offence and sentenced under sections 148 and 149 of the Code to undergo rigorous imprisonment each for three years.

3. In opening the case for the appellants, Mr. Antaldas took the formal objection that the present Commissioner of the Northern Division is debarred, under section 556 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, from taking any part in the proceedings against the Bhils who were captured on Mangarh Hill on the morning of the 17th November, 1913. I record the fact of the objection having been taken but will not discuss the point further than to observe that I can find nothing in that section which would make my sitting as a High Court either illegal or improper.
4. The learned pleader for the appellants, who has dealt very ably and very fairly with every point in the evidence which might conceivably be of use to them, has argued that the Bhils, with Govindgir, went up on to Mangarh for purely religious purposes and in order to hold a Fair—that there is no evidence to show that any political design underlay the movement that so far from making arrogant demands they were extremely humble and couched their petition to the Political Agent in obsequious terms—that their refusal so disperse when called upon to do so was due to their fear of the soldiers—that their refusal to disperse can not be construed into an act of war—and that if indeed they resisted the troops at all they can be held guilty of nothing more than of being members of an unlawful assembly and of

rioting. He has called my attention to two recorded cases, one in 37 Calcutta, page 518, in which Carnduff J. remarked that :—"The expression 'wages war' which is used in section 121 of the Penal Code must be construed in its ordinary sense as a phrase in common use in the English language and it is impossible to hold that any of the overt acts alleged in this case amount to an offence provided for by that section". The second reference was to 34 Bombay page 409, in the case of *Imperator vs. G.D. Savarkar*; the learned pleader specially called my attention to the following excerpt from the judgement of Heaton J. :—"So long as a man only tries to influence feeling, to excite a state of mind he is not guilty of anything more than sedition. It is only when he definitely and clearly incites to action that he is guilty of instigating and therefore abetting the waging of war". A further point which he has made is that in the case of the Talavia rising in Broach in the year 1885 when Mr. Prescott the Superintendent of Police being mistaken for the Collector of the District was killed by a mob which marched through Broach armed and with intent to give battle to the authorities—a case in which many of the attendant circumstances were almost identically the same as in the present case not one of the Talavias who were convicted and punished was convicted of the offence of waging war.

5. The three cases quoted may easily be differentiated from the present one. In the Calcutta and the Bombay case there was no act which could reasonably be construed into an act of war, using that expression in its ordinary sense. The Broach disturbance was a riot in which a few hundred people were concerned who made no preparations for war but were driven by their leader into excess which resulted in the shedding of blood and the destruction of property; Govindgir's case was much more than that.

What is the meaning of the phrase "to wage war"? The point has been discussed at some length by Mayne in his criminal Law from which I may quote the following:—"To make out the offence, it was necessary to shew that the distinct object aimed at was, either directly to overthrow the

authority and power of the Sovereign, or to do so indirectly by coercing the Sovereign and his advisers into adopting some different policy, or passing or releasing some law in a matter of general concern." Next may be quoted Mayne's extract from Tindal C. J.'s summing up in the Chartist case, as follows :—"To constitute a high treason by levying war, there must be insurrection; there must be force accompanying that insurrection, and it must be for the accomplishment of an object of a general nature. But if all these circumstances are found to concur in any individual case, that is quite sufficient to constitute a levying of war."

6. The two cases which have been quoted from Calcutta and Bombay are altogether adverse to the Appellants Govindgir and Punja. If we give to the expression "to wage war" its ordinary meaning as an expression commonly used in the English language we cannot avoid the conviction that the two accused waged war. We cannot close our eyes to the fact that the leaders in this outbreak, that is to say the appellants Govindgir and Punja did not stop short at trying to influence feeling; the whole evidence goes to shew that they definitely and clearly incited to action. And we find in the case all the constituents of the offence mentioned by Tindal C.J., namely in insurrection, the use of force accompanying the insurrection, and the accomplishment of an object of a general nature in the shape of a desire to coerce the States of Sunth and Banswara, or to cause them to be coerced, into changing their methods of Government in a manner in which they did not desire to change them. Of the latter Exhibit 3/6 is a sufficiently clear indication.
7. With regard to the original purpose underlying Govindgir's action in making himself the Guru of the Bhils and obtaining over them an almost absolute ascendancy, we can only make surmises. It is possible to argue that from the very beginning he had in view an organization of the Bhils which would give him a political status, and perhaps even rulership. I am however content to believe that in the beginning his object was merely the laudable one of raising the moral tone of, and ameliorating the general conditions

of life of, the class among whom he elected to work. His teaching appears to have been pure, and ennobling in its effects and there is reason to believe that the Bhils who came in contact with him and became his disciples were raised to a higher plane of morality and decency than they had ever reached before he took them in hand. I conceive that at first Govindgir's thoughts did not run to insurrection or the upsetting of established Government; he was chiefly concerned with the moral improvement of those whom he had chosen for his people. But as the days went by and he felt his power increasing his ambitions expanded and he set out to enforce a recognition of the claims of the Bhils to admission into a higher social grade; an exaggerated view of his own power caused him to deceive himself and led him into the error of pitting himself against the States. He came to believe himself destined not merely to improve the morals of the Bhils but also to restore to them the temporal power which is believed to have been theirs some 800 years ago. Probably his arrest in Dungarpur which, as the Judges of the Special Court have remarked "seemed likely to cause an unexpected commotion" was the direct cause of his moving out with his followers to Mangarh, a hill situated partly in the Sunth State and partly in Banswara, and according to the tradition, once a stronghold of a Bhil Raj.

8. The evidence recorded sets it beyond doubt that the assemblage on Mangarh hill of so many thousands of Bhils was in compliance with the stringent orders which he issued; there is ample evidence on the record that he issued orders in very threatening terms to particular individuals to come to him on the Hill, promising them the direct punishment if they disobeyed his orders.

The concentration on the Hill of his armed followers armed in a altogether extraordinary way—was followed almost at once by a wanton act on a Fort belonging to the Raja of Sunth by Bhils from the Hill, by the abduction of two men of the Sunth Police, and the brutal murder of one of them, and by the looting of the house of the Bamri Patel who had

given information to the Sunth authorities of the murder and the slaughter of his cattle. It was followed by an absolute disregard of both the requests and the orders of the Political Officers, and finally by premeditated resistance to the advance of the troops. The Bhils attacked and fired upon the troops as they came upon to the Hill to disperse them.

9. Every fact on record goes to disprove the theory that the massing of the Bhils on Mangadh was nothing more than an assemblage for the exercise of religion. Had the exercise of religious practices been the sole reason for the gathering there would have been no attack on the Fort, the Bhils would have carried nothing more than a few bows and arrows and possibly a spear or two (they were almost all of them armed as for war), the Hill would not have been clearly and effectually fortified nor the approaches blocked, the worshippers would have sat quietly while the officers of Government came up the Hill to speak to them and there would have been no active resistance to the advance of the troops; there would have been no armed guards to prevent the officers of the British Government from setting foot on the Hill or entering into verbal communication with the leader or guru; there would have been no capture and ill-treatment of the Sunth Head Constable and no forcible detention of the envoys sent by the Political Agent, Southern Rajputana States.
10. Nor is there any room for supposing that the Bhils resorted to Mangarh Hill as a refuge from the oppression of the subordinate State Officials, and with a view to attracting the attention of the British Government to their grievances. For in the first place they would naturally have moved into some spot in British territory where, as they were undoubtedly aware, they would have been at liberty to practise any religion they pleased and to reform themselves to their heart's content. And in the second place they would have sought every opportunity of meeting the British Officers and laying their grievances before them instead of refusing to come down from the Hill to meet them,



refusing to allow the Officers to come on to the Hill and threatening them with violence if they attempted to approach the guru or set foot on the Hill. The one reply received from the leaders to the representations of the Political Agent's was Exhibit 3/6, a rigmarole making vague allegations against the Rulers of the States and their subordinates, and formulating, not temperately worded requests, but insolent demands such as might conceivably have been expected from one of two adversaries who, by virtue of superior strength, were in a position to dictate terms of peace to the other. In formulating those conditions, Govindgir aimed at coercing the States of Sunth and Banswara into altering entirely their system of Government.

11. There is, I hold, no other explanation of the gathering on Mangarh Hill than that the Bhils, under the leadership of Govindgir and his lieutenant Punja were out to compel the Rajput States to accept the terms of the Bhil Raj and were not only prepared to commit overt acts of force and violence to achieve that end but did actually commit them. The learned judges of the Special Court could not have come to any other conclusion than that at which they arrived namely that Govindgir and Punja did wage war against the States of Sunth and Banswara.
12. The law provides for one of two punishments only for the offence of waging war—death or transportation for life together with the forfeiture of property. In this case I do not consider that the circumstances require the infliction of the extreme penalty of death. The learned Judges of the Special Court have, very rightly as I believe, made a very strong recommendation for mercy in the case of Govindgir. Acting on that recommendation and believing that the requirements of justice will be fully met by the infliction of the lesser punishment I alter the sentence in the only manner in which the Law permits me to alter it, namely to one of transportation for life. On Govindgir lies the responsibility for all the lives lost on Mangarh Hill. For his actions Punja is almost equally responsible, and I

am not prepared to mitigate the severity of the sentence passed upon him under Section 121 of the Penal Code.

13. On the second count Punja alone has been convicted of the murder of the Sunth Police Sepoy Gul Mohammed, and the question for me to decide is whether there is any reasonable doubt of the truth of the story told by the Head Constable Yusuf Khan. It is absolutely certain that this man was kept in bonds on the hill for some 14 to 15 days, that Govindgir if he did not directly order this man's abduction at least approved of it and confirmed it, and that Yusif Khan was not released until the evening of the 15th after the most preemptory orders for his release had been given by the Political Agent. Immediately after his release he was examined and his statement was recorded by the Political Agent, Rewakantha; the written statement does not form part of the judicial record but it is still in existence. The marks on Yusif Khan's body bore testimony to the truth of what he stated with regard to his own ill-treatment. Under all the circumstances there could not possibly have been produced any direct evidence of the murder other than that of Yusif and his evidence may not be discarded merely by reason of its being unsupported by another witness; of circumstantial evidence there is little since the body of the deceased constable was never found. His belt was however found on the Hill after the troops had cleared it. I must hold that there is no reason whatever for doubting the truth of the evidence given by Yusif Khan, the one who escaped death, and that there are ample grounds for finding that Punja was present at, and took a part in, the murder of Gul Mohammed. The learned Judges of the Special Court have humanely passed upon him the lesser sentence of transportation for life, and I am not prepared to show him further leniency.
14. On behalf of the remaining appellants Mr Antaldas has urged that a man may not be convicted of rioting when armed unless it can be clearly proved that he had arms in his hand. It has only to be considered however that on Mangarh Hill, a body of some 800 or 900 men threw down

their arms and came forward in submission only when they were covered by the rifles of the troops. At that time only the troops were on the Hill; the civil officers came up afterwards, and it would have been absurd to expect the troops under such conditions to fit each weapon to its owner, and prepare lists accordingly. The common sense view is that which was taken by the Judges of the Special Court-the assemblage as a whole was armed with guns, swords, bows and arrows, etc, and it is not material whether particular individuals held no arms in their hands.

15. I must maintain the convictions of these men. But I reduce the sentence passed on each to one of six months rigorous imprisonment. They were probably not more worthy of punishment than the hundreds who, on the morning of the 17th November, were dismissed to their homes after admonition and amongst whom were possibly many Patels or Headmen.

The applicants were arrested because they were known to be Headmen who might fairly be held responsible for taking part in the disturbances, but it must be borne in mind that they were led away, and in some instances at least coerced by Govindgir and his Chelas. I am of opinion that six months rigorous imprisonment will fully meet the necessities of the case."

✓ The Bhil movement was crushed by the British but the Bhils were agitating on the arrest of their Guru. The death sentence given to Guru Govindgir shocked the Bhils. The popularity of Govindgir was wide spread among the Bhils as he was the man who brought the Bhils from darkness to light. Govindgir emancipated them from all biases. Considering his popularity the Governor General altered the sentence passed on Govindgir.

✓ The sentence of transportation for life passed on Govindgir was reduced to ten years rigorous imprisonment.<sup>52</sup> In 1930 he was released on the condition that he would not be allowed to go in the territories of Sunth, Dungarpur, Banswara,

Kushalgarh and Idar State. He was allowed to live in Jhalod village in Panchmahal District of Ahmedabad division.

The Bhil movement under the leadership of Govindgir failed in establishing the Bhil Raj. The above movement was suppressed ruthlessly by the British armies. But this movement had far-reaching impacts. This movement awakened the Bhils and made them aware of their rights. The Bhils came out from the age-old social, economic and political bondages. Immediately after the suppressions of this Bhil rising the British authorities made a thorough enquiry into the conditions of the Bhils in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat.<sup>53</sup> The British authorities recognised the forest rights of the Bhils and to some extent the traditional forest rights were restored. The Bhils also got reduced the burden of land revenue, *lag bags* (cesses), *begar* (forced labour) etc. The administrative and police officers were advised to behave properly with the Bhils. The police and judicial powers of Jagirdars were taken off. The harassment and ill-treatment by the authorities was mitigated. This movement became the symbol of the Bhil liberation. The importance of this movement can not be undermined. This movement became the source of inspiration and courage to the down-trodden classes to fight against oppression and exploitation. The movement also generated consciousness not only among the Bhils but also among the all sections of society of Southern Rajasthan and it encouraged peasant movements and freedom struggle in Rajasthan.

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## PEASANT MOVEMENTS IN THE UDAIPUR STATE

The position of peasants was worst in the state of Udaipur. 87% of land was in the hands of Jagirdars which was known as the non—*Khalsa* area, while only 13% land was under the *Khalsa* system. The conditions of peasants were more deplorable in the Jagir areas where feudalism was prevalent in a crude form. The peasants were treated as slaves. When the feudal exploitation and oppression reached such an extent that it made difficult the very existence of peasants, the peasants arose against the feudal lords. The first peasant movement of Rajasthan was launched in Bijolia feudatory of the State of Udaipur. "The Bijolia peasant movement became the pioneer movement in Rajasthan which encouraged and inspired not only the agrarian struggle but also other mass movements. This also paved the way for social, political and economic changes in Rajasthan which brought the society out of the clutches of feudal bondage."

Bijolia was "A" class Jagir of the Udaipur State which is now in the Bhilwara district of Rajasthan. The Jagirdar of Bijolia was among the sixteen chiefs of Udaipur State who formed the council of Maharana. The area of this Jagir was about 100 sq. miles which was concentrated within a group of 25 villages. The population of Bijolia town was 4000 and the total population of this Jagir was 12,000 in 1921.<sup>1</sup> In 1931 the total population of Bijolia feudatory was 15,000 out of which 10,000 were peasants. The population of Dhakara (a peasant caste who were the main agitators) was 6000 which formed 60% of the peasants.<sup>2</sup>



The peasant movement of Bijolia may be divided into three main phases. The first phase between 1897-1915 was marked by a spontaneous movement which was advanced by local leadership. The second phase between 1915-1923 marked a new state of consciousness among the peasants and it was led by trained and matured leaders of national status. Not only this but this movement also linked up with the main stream of the nation. The third phase continued upto 1941. The issues of the movement remained same during the whole period but some new issues were added to this with the expansion of the movement. The main issues were as follows.

“The method of assessment and collection of land revenue was the main issue of this movement.” The most prevalent method was *Lata* and *Kunta*. Under this system the standing crops were assessed by the *Kamdar* and other revenue officials of the feudatory. The estimates of the total produce were roughly calculated on which the share of feudatory was fixed. This was a primitive system which was plundering the peasants. In this the peasants were deprived of their hard earned produce. As Bijay Singh Pathik bitterly remarked, *lata kunta* became *loot pat* of peasants by Jagirdar.<sup>3</sup> Apart from this system, there was a persistent fear of ejection of peasants as the insecurity of land tenure prevailed. The peasants could be ejected on the ground of non-payment of land revenue. The rate of land revenue was half of the gross produce and remissions were not allowed even in the famine or abnormal years.<sup>4</sup> Mostly peasants were forced to borrow the money from money-lenders on an exorbitant rate of interest.

In addition to the land revenue a large number of *Lag-bags* (cesses) were charged from the peasants. Some of these were regular and some occasional. The burden of *Lag-bags* was almost double of the amount of land revenue. This was a cruel and unjust form of exploitation. There were 86 different types of cesses on cultivators.<sup>5</sup> The collection of cesses was not a new system as it had been in vogue since the medieval period. Initially the cesses were charged from the peasants and other masses to meet out the incidental expenses of the administration. The amount and number of these was nominal. The condition of

Bijolia was peculiar. The area was a victim of Maratha invasions. When the Marathas attacked Mewar the *thikana* of Bijolia became the first victim. These attacks created panic among the peasants as their whole life was shattered. The peasants used to fight the enemy by co-operating with Jagirdar and with the help of peasants the Jagirdar was able to reestablish his power and administration. In fact, during these days of crisis the masses and Jagirdar of Bijolia were living like a family. In case the Jagirdar was in need of extra money for military, administration and domestic purposes, the Peasant *Panchayats* collected the money and presented it to the Jagirdar. In the event of bad season and destruction of crops remissions were given to the peasants. Not only this but the peasants also got remission of land revenue when there was marriage of peasant's daughter or any death in his family.<sup>6</sup> The insecure and critical political conditions of Bijolia brought the ruler and ruled very close to each other and both were the fundamental need of each other. In 1818 Udaipur State concluded a treaty with the British when the Maharana got the assurance against external invasions.

With this treaty the relations between ruler and ruled changed. The Jagirdar became loyal and responsible to the State and the British in place of his subjects. The money which the Jagirdar was getting from the peasants in addition to the land revenue became a regular part of his income in the name of *lag-bag*. The number and amount of these cesses expanded with the growing extravagance of Jagirdars and colonial economic burden. The intensity of the exploitation of the peasants can be gauged from the fact that they were deprived of 87% of their produce according to an estimate.<sup>7</sup> The peasants were of the view that the *Lag bags* made their life miserable. The *Lag bags* compelled the peasant to revolt against the Jagirdar.

The burden of land revenue and cesses made the peasants debtors. The moneylenders extended the loans on exorbitant rates of interest and imposed arbitrary conditions. The moneylenders were an important part of the feudal and colonial economy. The money-lender also exploited the peasant masses through inhuman practices. He was looting the peasants mischievously. In case of disputes between money-lenders and peasants

the Jagirdar sided with money-lenders. "The indebtedness of the peasants was an important issue and cause of the peasant movement of Bijolia."

The welfare activities such as education and medical <sup>care</sup> were quite absent in the Bijolia feudatory. The peasants were living in the darkness of the medieval age. The peasant movement also aimed at securing educational and medical facilities.

"The arbitrary powers of the Jagirdar of Bijolia were another issue of the peasant movement." The Jagirdar was empowered with judiciary rights in the civil and criminal matters. He was empowered to sentence upto five years prison term and fine up to Rs. 500/- in both the cases.<sup>8</sup> Though the Jagirdar recognised the Maharana Mewar and the British power as his overlords, yet he was the arbitrary ruler of his Jagir. There was no written law and he acted on his will and whim. The peasants challenged the arbitrary position of the Jagirdars.

"The question of *begar* was also an important cause of the peasant movement." The peasants were compelled to render *begar* by the Jagirdar and his officials on various occasions. The peasants were forced to supply the bullock cart to carry the grain of land revenue to the Jagirdar's place without payment and food and fodder. Any type of weight or luggage of the Jagirdar, State officers and Jagir officials had to be carried by the peasant on bullock cart, cattle or on his own head. The peasants were also captured to serve the authorities wherever they wanted. The peasants brought on *begar* were prevented to work on their own fields and their work was suffered.

The peasants were suffering severely under the above mentioned feudal exploitation and oppression. The prevalent exploitative system challenged the very existence of the peasants. The peasants were compelled to fight against the feudal system.

### First Phase 1897-1915

In 1897 thousands of Dhakar peasants from various villages of Bijolia gathered at a village Girdharpura in a death feast (Nukta) of Gangaram Dhakar's father.<sup>9</sup> The exploited and oppressed peasants discussed their miseries with each other reached

the consensus that the root cause of their sufferings was the heavy burden of land revenue cesses and forced labour. The peasants also agreed to take some steps to get relief and decided to send a deputation to the Maharana at Udaipur to represent their grievances. The above gathering also decided the names of Nanji Patel of Berisal and Thakari Patel of Gopal niwas for deputation. The deputation of two representatives reached Udaipur and after continuous efforts of eight months they succeeded in presenting their grievances before the Maharana. The Maharana deputed a revenue officer to hold enquiry in the revenue matters of Bijolia.<sup>10</sup>

The enquiry conducted by the revenue officer found the complaints of the peasants valid and true. The Jagirdar did not allow the peasants to meet this enquiry officer, even then the enquiry report went against the Jagirdar. The same report was presented before the *Mahakma Khas*. The *Mahakma Khas* without any action issued a warning to the Jagirdar and much attention was not paid.

The Jagirdar took a different view of the matter. Instead of introducing agrarian reforms he started harassing and terrorising the peasants. He felt that the peasants' complaint to the state was a challenge to his authority. Both the members of above deputation viz. Nanji Patel and Thakri Patel were exiled from the territory of Bijolia Jagir. The peasants of Bijolia felt discouraged by the above action of Jagirdar but they did not lose heart altogether. In fact the Jagirdar's action made them realise more acutely than ever before that their miseries were caused by the feudal exploitation.

The peasants were not happy with the behaviour of the Jagirdar. The year 1899-1900 was the year of famine and distress which worsened the condition of the peasants. An incident of 1903 compelled the peasants to defy the authority of the Jagirdar openly. In 1903 the Jagirdar imposed a new cess known as *Chanwari lag*. According to this cess every subject of Bijolia had to pay rupees thirteen to the Jagirdar on the occasion of his daughter's marriage. The new cess not only burdened the peasantry economically but it was also derogatory socially. In protest the peasants presented before the Jagirdar about two hundred of girls of

marriageable age and asked him to withdraw the *Chanwari* cess as they were not able to marry off their own daughters due to economic burden. The Jagirdar misbehaved with the peasants and answered in an inhuman way, "sell these girls in the market and deposit the chanwari."<sup>11</sup> The peasants became uneasy with this misbehaviour. The peasants threatened the Jagirdar that "they will not live in a place like this where the ruler live you ruled, who wanted to get sell our daughters."<sup>12</sup> In the night of same day the peasants of various villages in large number migrated to Gwalior State

The peasants were of the view that their migration will adversely affected the Jagir with the loss of revenue, while they can get land in Gwalior State to cultivate on liberal terms. But this act of peasants was an open challenge to the Jagirdar's authority as the subjects of a Jagir were the property of the Jagirdar. This has been also described by a British military officer as "one of the old feudal customs of Rajpootana was that no artisan or serf, as the lower class might well be called, could leave the territory of his own immediate chief or Thakoor, and go and settle in that of another, without permission. These men formed in fact part of the property inherited by the feudal lords from their ancestors, and were regularly attached to the soil."<sup>13</sup> When the Jagirdar came to know that the peasants in large number had gone, he immediately rushed to them with his employees, felt sorry before the peasants and brought them back. He withdrew the *Chanwari* cess immediately in 1904 announced the following concessions.<sup>14</sup>

1. The *Kamdar* of the *Thikana* would perform *Kunta* only with the consent of the Patel and five Kisans of the village.
2. Formerly the *Bhog-Lag* was charged at the rate of four *seers* per maund, but this was to be charged at the rate of two and half *seers* a maund. For weighing the corn *Kanta* (balance) would be used in place of *Takari*.
3. The revenue on *Sub-ban* (Jute-Cotton) would be charged at the rate of Rs. 2½ per bigha.
4. The *Hasil* (revenue in cash) on opium would be charged at the rate of Rs 5/- per bigha as taken before.
5. Formerly *Banta* (share) was charged at the rate of half of the produce, henceforth it would be charged at the rate of 2/5th of the produce.

6. The *Khar Lakhar Lag* on *Kokuda* land would be charged at the rate of six annas per bigha and on the *Mal* land at the rate of three annas per bigha.
7. Formerly the *Poola Lag* was charged at the rate of 300 *Poolas* per rupee but in future it would be charged at the rate of 1000 per rupee.
8. The buffaloes of the peasant would be used in *begar* without payment only when a European or the *Maharana* of Udaipur visited the *Thikana*.
9. The peasant was allowed to cut the *babool* trees growing on his land for his personal use. In case he sells them, half of the price would be deposited in the *Thikana*.
10. The new cess of *Noot barar* would be abolished.
11. The *Ghore-Ka-Ghas* cess which was taken freely for the horses of the *Thikana* would not be charged.
12. The *kisan* would be allowed to drive out the pigs and other animals from their farm for the safety of their crops.
13. *Mapa* cess (custom duty) would be charged at the rate of one paisa per rupee.
14. *Istmurari-kura-lag* charged at the rate of one anna per rupee would be abolished.
15. The *Singoti lag* (cattle cess) charged at the time of selling cattle in the village would be abolished.

The above concessions were announced by the Jagirdar to pacify the agitating peasants. Though, these concessions were not very substantial, still they were important as the token of the victory of the peasants. The concession did not bring about much change in the conditions of the peasants.

The above concessions were withdrawn in 1906 by the Rao (Chief). Rao Krishan Singh died in 1906 without any heir and his near relation Prithvi Singh became the Jagirdar. He not only withdrew the above concessions but also imposed some new taxes on the pretext of *Talwar-bandhai lag* (Succession cess) which he paid to the Maharana. The new regime caused much harassment to the peasants as the new Jagirdar started collecting illegal taxes from the peasants by force mercilessly.<sup>15</sup> One of the reasons

behind the harassing behaviour of the Jagirdar was that he was an outsider who had come from Kama (Bharatpur) and he had no traditional relationship with the subjects of Bijolia feudatory.<sup>16</sup>

"The peasants of Bijolia were living in the state of destitution and they were in the clutches of feudal exploitation. In 1913 the peasants were again compelled to start a movement against the Jagirdar. The 1913 protest was led by a Sadhu, Sitaram Das.<sup>17</sup>"

This movement was also encouraged and influenced by the *Bhil* revolt of 1912-13 under the leadership of a *Sadhu*, Govindgar. In March 1913 nearly 1000 peasants under the leadership of *Sadhu* Sitaram Das assembled before the palace of Bijolia Jagirdar to present their grievances. The Jagirdar refused to see the peasants and he ignored them. The behaviour of the Jagirdar compelled the peasants to take further steps to fight the feudal oppression. The peasants decided not to cultivate the lands in Bijolia and the lands were left fallow in the year 1913-14. This decision resulted in heavy loss of revenue to the Jagirdar while the peasants cultivated the lands in the adjoining states of Gwalior, Bundi and the Khalsa land of Udaipur State. In December, 1913 the Jagirdar, Prithvi Singh, died and his minor son Keshri Singh ascended the throne of Bijolia feudatory.<sup>18</sup> As the Jagirdar was a minor, the Jagir was put under the direct control of Udaipur State. This change was in favour of the agitating peasants. The grievances of the peasants were heard by the *Mahakma Khas* of Udaipur State and the *Mahakma Khas* immediately in January, 1914 appointed two officers to look into the matter and settle the same.

After thorough enquiries, consultations and discussions, Udaipur State persuaded the Bijolia Jagir to grant some concessions to the peasants on 24th June, 1914<sup>19</sup> which were as follows :

1. One third portion of the produce would be taken as *bhog* (revenue) instead of two fifth.
2. Formerly, the *Khunachi* cess was charged at the rate of  $6\frac{1}{2}$  seers per maund, but in future it would be charged at the rate of  $4\frac{1}{2}$  seers per maund.
3. Formerly, the *Banta* on Mangoes and Mahva were charged one half of the produce, but now it would be one third.

4. The peasant would be allowed to cut the *babool* trees for his own use without paying any cess subject to the conditions that he would not sell them to others.
5. The *Hasil* (cash revenue) on cotton was charged at the rate of rupees three, annas four and paisas two per bigha along with a cess at the rate of  $7\frac{1}{2}$  seers cotton per bigha. Now, it would be charged at the rate of rupees four per bigha and the cess would be totally abolished.
6. The cess *keena ka Dhan* taken by the *Sahna* (some type of Police) would be abolished
7. The persons accompanying the *Kamdar* (general administrator) during *Kunta* would not be given any corn.
8. The supply of the bundles of fuel and grass by the *Kisans* as *begar* to the Jagir during the rainy season would be abolished.

The above concessions were only declared but were actually never put into effect. This was a strange state of affairs. The movement of 1913-14 failed which created much dissatisfaction. Though, the peasants continued their protest but just after the declaration of the concessions they resumed the work of cultivation on the lands of Bijolia. In 1915-16 the second phase of the Bijolia peasant movement started.

The first phase of the movement instilled encouragement and a new consciousness among the peasants of Bijolia. Though, they could not win over this struggle but they prepared themselves to oppose the feudal exploitation. In this phase this was a spontaneous revolt led by the ignorant and uneducated peasant leaders. "This phase created the seed-bed for the growth of strong anti-feudal plants."

### Second Phase (1915-1922)

In 1915 the Bijolia peasant movement took a radical turn. The movement of 1913-14 was led by Sadhu Sitaram Das, who was basically a literary man. In 1915 he invited Vijay Singh Pathik to assume the leadership of the movement. Vijay Singh Pathik was an ex-revolutionary connected with Ras Bihari Bose's revolutionary group. His real name was Bhoop Singh. He belonged



to a village, Guthawali, in Bulandshahar district of Uttar Pradesh. He was Gujar (cultivator cum cattle breeder caste) by caste and his grand father and father were among the freedom fighters of the first Indian War of Independence. His grand father died fighting with the British forces in 1857 and his father was arrested after suppression of the revolt. This background of Vijay Singh Pathik made him revolutionary. He was sent to organise revolutionary activities in Rajasthan by his party. His party comrades staged a <sup>the</sup>speculator bomb attack on Governor General Hardinge while he was making his official entry into the new capital on 23rd December 1912. This incident brought set back to the revolutionary activities. Again in 1914 Rasbehari Bose and Sachin Sanyal planned a military revolt on 21 February 1915, but the plan failed because of treachery. Ras Bchari Bose had to flee to Japan and Sachin Sanyal was transported for life. Vijay Singh Pathik was also arrested in Rajasthan with his comrades on the suspicion of his connection with the above revolutionary group and he was put in the prison at Tatgarh. He escaped from the prison and assumed the name of Vijay Singh Pathik and dressed himself as Rajasthani Rajput.

After escaping from the prison Vijay Singh Pathik established Vidya Pracharni Sabha at a village, Ochheri, near Chittor to work among the peasantry of the area. He soon gained popularity all around the area. In 1915 he organised a function of Vidya Pracharni Sabha in which Sadhu Sitaram Das came as an invitee. He was impressed by the ideas of Pathik and he asked him to take over the leadership of the Bijolia peasant movement. Pathik reached Bijolia in 1916 and assumed the leadership of the movement.<sup>20</sup>

Vijay Singh Pathik was a matured politician and agitator. He gave a definite and organised shape to the peasant movement at Bijolia. He also established *Vidya Pracharni Sabha* at Bijolia and under this *Sabha* he started a library, a school, and a *Akhara*.<sup>21</sup> These were the institutions which became the centres of political activities. Manik Lal Verma who was a Jagir employee was highly impressed by the activities of Pathik and he resigned from the service to work among the peasants.<sup>22</sup> Manik Lal Verma opened schools at Barisal and Umaji-ka-Khera the on advice of Pathik under the guidance of *Vidya Pracharni Sabha*.

The movement was launched by the caste *Parchayat* of Dhakar as in 1897, but it was a weak organisation. In 1916 Pathik organised a peasant organisation known as *Bijolia Kisan Panchayat*. He established a central committee of the *Kisan Panchayat* which was named as *Kisan Panchayat Board* and its branches were opened in each village.<sup>23</sup> The central committee also established a *panchayat fund* with subscriptions from its members.<sup>24</sup> Manna Lal Patel was appointed *Sarpanch* (President) and a committee of thirteen members was constituted under him to conduct the movement.<sup>25</sup>

The main demands of the peasants were related to the land revenue, cesses, *begar*, etc. from the very beginning of this movement, but by this time some new issues were also added. The question of war fund tax was a burning issue. In 1916 the *Bijolia thikana* imposed war tax on the instance of Udaipur State. The year 1916 was a famine year in *Bijolia* where most of the crops were destroyed due to scarcity of rains and crops diseases. The second new issue related to the money-lenders. The money-lenders were exploiting the peasants under the support and protection of *Jagirdars* as in cases of dispute between peasants and money-lenders the *Jagirdar* always sided up with money-lenders.<sup>26</sup> In fact the money-lenders were part of feudal economy and were a link in the chain of exploiters. To fight the feudalism it was necessary to fight the money-lenders. During the movement the money-lenders supported and justified the *Jagirdar*. In the second phase the class division became clearcut and the masses were imbued with class consciousness. Obviously, the protest against the money-lenders by the peasant was the outcome of the new class consciousness.

The peasant leaders under the guidance and decision of *Kisan Panchayat Board* launched their anti-feudal campaign by holding meetings with the peasants from village to village. The leaders also collected petitions from the peasants regarding their grievances. In 1917 many petitions with thousands of signatures of peasants were sent to the *thikana* and Udaipur State, to abolish the cesses, forced labour, war tax, unjustified land revenue and to end the peasants' torture and oppression by the *Jagirdar* and his officials. The authorities ignored the above petitions and nothing was done in favour of the peasants. Udaipur State was of the view

that any type of concessions to the peasants would encourage the peasants all over the State to demand the same. The *Panchayat* Board decided to launch a no-rent campaign.<sup>27</sup> In August 1918 the no rent campaign was started with non co-operation movement.<sup>28</sup> The peasants decided not to obey the orders of *thikana*, and boycott the *thikana* police and courts. They also decided to not go to the town for shopping, not to drink and to stop the marriage and death feasts.<sup>29</sup>

The peasants were also enthused by the news of the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia. Leaders such as Pathik and Verma disseminated among the peasants the news about the establishment of the peasants' and workers' rule in Russia. This international event affected the course of the peasant movement of Bijolia.<sup>30</sup> The movement took a very strong turn. The Maharana of Udaipur was adamant not to consider the demands. Moreover, the Maharana instructed the *thikana* authorities to crush the movement ruthlessly for which he assured all help and support to the *thikana*. All the main activists of the movement including Manik Lal Verma and Sadhu Sita Ram Das were arrested. In all fifty one persons were arrested.<sup>31</sup> Vijay Singh Pathik went underground and he guided the movement in the absence of other leaders. In protest five hundred peasants demonstrated before the fort of Bijolia and they were also made prisoners.<sup>32</sup> *Jathas* of the peasants were reaching there for *satyagrah* and thousands of peasants sat on *dharna*. The above activities compelled the Udaipur Government to appoint an enquiry commission and to release the peasants who were taken prisoners subsequent to the arrest of the fifty one activists.

The enquiry commission appointed by the Udaipur Government reached Bijolia in April 1919.<sup>33</sup> The peasants put before the commission the demand of the release of their leaders and activists. The peasants insisted that they would not hold discussions with the commission until their comrades were released. There upon the commission ordered the release of the activists arrested during the agitation. The commission found the grievances genuine but on the insistence of the *thikana* no action was taken. The peasants were not disappointed with this but they got more encouragement to strengthen their agitation. To them the release of their comrades was a success of their movement. So the movement continued sustained by the strong will of the peasants.

Meanwhile the *thikana* authorities were desperately trying to crush the movement. All sorts of torturing methods were used, but nothing not succeed in suppressing the movement as the peasants were under the influence of the new conciousness. The majority of the peasants in Bijolia belonged to Dhakar caste and the movement in its early stage was launched by the *Dhakar Panchayat*. But after the establishment of Bijolia *Kisan Panchayat* the caste *panchayat* went in the background. The Udaipur officials tried to make capital out of the caste look of the movement. They tried to break the kisan unity but by this time the movement had gained a wider social base. An official document had depicted that half of the total population was participating in the agitation. Thus the agitators numbered about 9000, the *Dhakars* numbering about 6000 and rest belonging to other castes.<sup>34</sup>

Vijay Singh Pathik established *Rajasthan Sewa Sangh* in 1919 and situated his headquarters at Ajmer which was under direct British rule. From Ajmer Pathik guided the movement. Pathik was in close contact with Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi. Through Vidyarthi's paper *Pratap* Pathik brought the Bijolia movement on the national scene.

The movement was intensified and peasants decided not to cultivate the lands of Bijolia. The Rajasthan Sewa Sangh and the Rajputana Madhya Bharat Sabha also extended their support to the movement. The leaders of the peasants tried to get the support of the Indian National Congress, but could not succeed because the congress was not in favour of agitation in the princely states. In December 1919 the Congress Session was held at Amritsar in which Vijay Singh Pathik put the matter of Bijolia before the National leaders. Pathik tried to include the Bijolia affairs in the agenda. He also narrated the sufferings and miseries of the peasants and history of the movement before Lokmanya Tilak. Tilak agreed to place before the session a resolution in connection with the Bijolia affairs. He did place a resolution, which was seconded by Kelkar. But Madan Mohan Malviya and Gandhiji opposed the proposal. Though the matter was not officially taken up by the Congress, but it did attract the attention of the national leaders.<sup>35</sup> The leaders of Bijolia built up pressure which compelled the Udaipur Maharana to appoint a second enquiry commission. The commission was appointed in February 1920.<sup>36</sup> The new commission

was welcomed by the peasants but *Kisan Panchayat Board* decided to continue the agitation until the decision of the commission was received.<sup>37</sup>

Thakur Raj Singh of Bedla was appointed the Chairman of the Commission and Rama Kant Malviya and Takhat Singh Mehta were the members. The members of the Commission called the representatives of the *Kisan Panchayat* at Udaipur to represent the matter before the Commission. Under the leadership of Manik Lal Verma a peasant deputation of 15 members reached Udaipur. This deputation represented their grievances before the Commission supported with proofs. The memorandum submitted by the deputation was divided into two parts, viz. (i) causes of the agitation and (ii) the demands of peasants which were as follows:<sup>38</sup>

### **Causes of the Agitation**

1. The land revenue has been doubled in comparison to the previous rate.
2. The cesses have been raised 75 times. The cesses are unaccounted and the *thikana* has no document of agreement about these. Our growing poverty due to unbearable cesses compelled us to agitate.
3. We can not tolerate the *begar* in any condition. On the pretext of *begar* the *thikana* officials used to take every thing of our necessity.
4. The *thikana* always tried to raise his income through illegal means which is not acceptable to us.
5. The *thikana* is not protecting lives and property of masses. Every day we are victims of thefts which are not traced.
6. The *thikana* courts are full of favouritism. Pleaders from outside are not allowed. We are not getting justice and these are very expensive also
7. We have been not provided with educational and medical facilities.

### **Demands of the Peasants**

1. *Lata Kunta* may be abolished and the land revenue should be fixed after settlement according to Khalsa.

2. *Begar* should be abolished and anyone should not be compelled to work even on payment.
3. All the cesses should be stopped.
4. Some reserved forests may be deforested.
5. Sufficient pasture land may be left.
6. The *Kisan* should get the right on purchased land.
7. The land revenue on the *Katchi* lands (lands without settlement) may be collected only when they are cropped.
8. In process of *Kunta* half persons may be *kisans* and half from towns belonging to all castes.
9. *Mapa*, *Singoti* etc. may be charged in the previous manner.
10. Arrangement of education and medical may be made. Four schools and one hospital should be opened immediately.
11. *Thikana* should be responsible for lives and property. He should pay the compensation for untraced thefts. The police should maintain the investigation diary according to the police manual. The Police men should keep watch in the villages under Numberdar (Village Head Man).
12. Arrangements of Justice and freedom should be made. The arbitrary powers of the *thikana* should be checked under laws and there should be published and clear laws. Autocracy of the *thikana* should be abolished.
13. *Thikana* is not obeying the orders of the Maharana. The *thikana* State relations should be defined and *thikana* should be compelled to obey the orders of the State.
14. *Jail* facilities should be raised. Food arrangements for prisoners should be made and *Jail* should be kept clean.
15. Looking to our agricultural income efforts should be made to reform our economic condition.

The enquiry commission after through investigations reached the conclusion that the cause of agitation was genuine. The commission also strongly recommended that the grievances of the peasants should be redressed. The State Government was not inclined towards the peasants. Consequently the government was not satisfied with the recommendations of the Commission.

Madan Mohan Malviya tried to persuade the Maharana on the advice of Mahatma Gandhi<sup>39</sup>. However, all the efforts of Madan Mohan Malviya failed as the State was not in favour of any agreement with the peasants. The appointment of the Commission was aimed at breaking the movement. The reason for the uncompromising attitude of the State was the insistence of Government of India to crush the movement as it was going on the lines of the Bolsheviks. The Government of India considered the Bijolia *Kisan Panchayat* as a copy of Bolshevik communes.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, the feudals of the State were also mounting up the pressures not to concede the demands of the peasants. The feudals of Udaipur feared that if the cesses, forced labour, *Lata*, *Kunta*, were abolished in Bijolia then their peasants too would demand the abolition of these. Thus, no compromise was made and the movement was continued.

The peasant movement of Bijolia was intensified by the leaders after June 1920 as by this time the chances of agreement had disappeared. The *Kisan Panchayat* began to run a parallel government through its leaders and volunteers. The *Kisan Panchayat* decided that no cultivator would have any direct dealings with the *thikana* authorities and they were advised to deal through the *Panchayat* only. The peasants refused to obey the orders of the *thikana*. They also refused to pay the land revenue, cesses and *begar* and decided to boycott the court and police of the *thikana*. The *Kisan Panchayat* paralysed the *thikana* administration. Vijay Singh Pathik was mounting up the pressures from the outside through press and contacts with national leaders.

In December, 1920 the historical Congress session was held at Nagpur in which the Congress approved and ratified the (policy of) non-cooperation movement. Vijay Singh Pathik attended the session with his followers from Bijolia. With the help of his followers he organised an exhibition depicting the plights of the peasants and the tyranny of the princely States and feudals in Rajasthan. Through this exhibition he attracted the attention of patriots assembled from all parts of India. Not only this but he also convened a separate meeting of the residents of princely States of other parts. They showed their sympathy with the Bijolian peasants and condemned the tyrannies of the Jagirdar.<sup>41</sup> He also tried to include the issue of Bijolia in the programme of the Congress movement.

Though Gandhiji was very much impressed with the Bijolia peasant movement and Vijay Singh Pathik but at this time he was soft towards the princely states and feudal lords.

The Indian National Congress which was the main Platform of freedom struggle, was controlled by those who did not look upon the anti-feudal struggle in native states as an essential part of the anti-imperialist struggle. Scientifically, feudalism was the pillar of imperialism but the Congress leaders could not understand this. Hence, the Congress had decided at its Nagpur session not to intervene in the affairs of the native States.<sup>42</sup> Gandhi defended this approach on the basis of his utopian logic which was far from logic. He said, "it is, I believe, an acceptable principle that Congress should not conduct or advise a *satyagraha* campaign in Indian States. This is only correct. The aim of Congress is *swaraj* for British India. If, therefore, it associates itself with *satyagraha* in other area, it would be transcending its self-imposed limits. When the Congress has won its goal, the problem of states will have been automatically solved. On the other hand, if people win *swaraj* in any Indian State, this will have little effect on British India". As a matter of fact, Gandhi believed the princes to be simple-hearted men. He was not ignorant of the tyranny of some of the rulers. "But I do not blame them for this. This State of affairs is one of the results of the British system".<sup>43</sup> Therefore, he made it clear that the reactionary rulers should expect "at the most fierce criticism of their methods and measures".<sup>44</sup> He declared that the native rulers would retain their states in independent India.<sup>45</sup>

The pro-feudal and compromising character of Gandhi's approach stands fully exposed when one goes through the constitution of the Princes and People's Service Society, which was drafted by Gandhi himself in 1928.<sup>46</sup> Here it will be pertinent to quote it in original.

### **The Princes & People's Service Society:**

#### **Object**

The object of the Society shall be the service of the princes and people of Indian States.



**Means**

- (1) Where there is no prohibition from the State concerned to undertake constructive work such as promoting Khadi, prohibition, social reform, removing untouchability and communalism etc.
- (2) Where there is no prohibition from the State concerned, to make courteous submission to the Princes regarding the people's grievances.
- (3) To conduct in a friendly spirit newspapers or magazines for the promotion of the object of the Society.
- (4) To discover the best basis of relations between the Princes and their people and the best system of government in accordance thereto and to cultivate public opinion on it.

*Note :-* This Society does not share the opinion that the existence of the States is by their very nature contrary to the growth of the spirit of full democracy. The Society believes that their existence need not be inconsistent with the growth of such spirit

**Limitations**

1. To refrain from criticising the acts and policy of one Prince in the territories of another.
2. To refrain from desiring or seeking the interference of the British Power in the affairs of the Indian States on any occasion whatsoever.
3. No member of the Society shall ever depart from the path of truth and non-violence.
4. In all matters of differences and doubts and in the determination of new policies, reference shall be made to Mahatma Gandhi for his final decision.

The above views of Gandhi about the princely states restrained the congress from involving itself in the affairs of these feudal states. The role of the leadership of freedom movement in India in the peasant movement has been analysed by E.M.S. Namboodripad which is near to some truth. He wrote that

“The bourgeois leadership of the national movement, however, was not prepared for such a combination of

the national and agrarian revolutionary movement. On the other hand, the more well organised and the militant peasants are the more panicky become for the leadership. Instead of trying to learn the art of revolutionary resistance from the peasantry, they tried to teach the peasants the art of non-violent surrender."<sup>47</sup>

When the Bijolian peasantry and their leader Vijay Singh Pathik approached the Indian National Congress and Gandhi, they showed their concern. Gandhi sent his secretary Mahadev Desai to enquire into the affairs of Bijolia. He submitted his report to Gandhi, but nothing could be done in regard to Bijolia.<sup>48</sup> Even, the Congress did not dare to pass a resolution against the feudal rulers. There was also differences between Gandhi and Pathik on the working of Pathik.<sup>49</sup> At the time of the Ahmedabad session (June 1924) Gandhi expressed the view that the subjects of the native states, if they could not bear the sufferings, should perform the *Hizrat*. This view was expressed in the presence of the Bijolian peasants, whose leader Vijay Singh Pathik quipped that the advice was well suited for impotence.<sup>50</sup> In fact Pathik contacted the Indian National Congress and Gandhi only to popularise the cause of Bijolia. Though he could not persuade the Congress leadership to extend active support, but he succeeded in getting the sympathy of them. When in 1921 the non-cooperation movement began in British India, the peasants in Bijolia felt encouraged to continue their movement in strong spirit. They were also of the view in 1920 that they are fighting on the call of Gandhi, by that time he became very much popular among the Indians. The nation-wide non-cooperation movement also became the source of inspiration for struggling peasants of Bijolia.

On the instance of the British the *thikana* authorities tried to crush the movement through inflicting atrocities. The *Kisan Panchayat* resisted the atrocities through its well organised and strong net work. The *Kisan Panchayat* also started shops, credit agencies to support the peasants. To get the support and intensify the movement Vijay Singh Pathik tried to launched the peasant movement in other parts of Udaipur state through *Rajasthan Seva Sangh*. By 1921 he had built up a strong peasant movement in the *thikanas* of Begun, Parsoli, Bhinder, Basi and some parts of

*Khalsa* of the Udaipur State. In December 1921 the Resident of Udaipur reported that

"the unrest is now spreading to Bhinder, an estate under the *darkar* management, where the cultivators are refusing to pay revenue. The situation in Bijolia and in the neighbouring *thikanas* of Parsoli, Begun, and Basi has distinctly deteriorated. There is a general refusal to pay revenue. There is threat of violence if any attempt is made to collect revenue or to enforce official orders. *Panchayats* have been formed in each village and over them is a general committee for taking decision on civil, criminal and revenue cases. They meet on fixed days and refuse to admit the authority of the Jagirdars. They have established a complete system of boycott and excommunication and impose fines on those who refuse to obey their summons. Large weekly meetings of cultivators armed with *Lathis* are held in every *thikana*. Volunteers wearing belts and badges have for the last three months been posted in each village. They disseminate notices of meetings and refuse to admit officials to the villages. An atmosphere of discontent is being created and the movement is spreading."<sup>51</sup>

In 1921 the movement entered into a more militant phase. The movement was being carried on in the name of Gandhi but it was quite different from the Gandhian style of functioning. In fact this phase was highly influenced by Russian Revolution of 1917. Wilkinson's Rajputana Agency Report of 1921 describes it as follows :

"Mewar is becoming a hotbed of lawlessness. Seditious emissaries are teaching the people that all men are equal. The land belongs to the peasants and not to the State or landlords. It is significant that the people are being urged to use the vernacular equivalent of the word "Comrade" instead of the customary styles of address. His Highness is said to have been threatened to be meted the fate of the 'czar'. The

movement is mainly anti-Maharana, but it might soon become anti-British and spread to adjoining British area !”

In such circumstances the British Government was afraid that if the Bijolia agitation was not controlled in time it would spread throughout the Rajputana. The peasant movements in all over Udaipur State were in full swing, meanwhile Motilal Tejawat started the tribal movement of the *Bhils* of Mewar, Sirohi, Palanpur, Danta, Sunth-Rampur and Marwar. The peasant movement of Bijolia was the main source of inspiration to other movements. Keeping this in view the British power decided to bring the Bijolia movement to an end.

The Government of India appointed a high power committee consisting of the Agent to Governor-General in Rajputana, Robert Holland, his Secretary Col. Ogalvi, the Resident of Udaipur, Wilkinson, the *Dewan* of Udaipur, Prabhash Chandra Chaterji, and the custom Hakim of Udaipur, Bihari Lal Kaushik.<sup>52</sup> The said committee reached Bijolia on 4th February, 1922 and talks for agreement began on 5th February. In the talks the *sarpanch* of the Bijolia *Kisan Panchayat* Board, Moti Chand, *Mantri* Narain Patel, Secretary of *Rajasthan Seva Sangh*, Ram Narain Choudhary, and Manik Lal Verma represented the peasants.<sup>53</sup> After a long discussion an agreement was reached. The main terms of the agreement were as follows :<sup>54</sup>

- (1) Prisoners in Jail would be treated well on humanitarian grounds and the *thikana* would have to bear all the expenses incurred on the prisoner during his stay in Jail. Female prisoners would be kept separate from males and would be treated in civilised manner. The scale of diets for prisoners would be as follows :

Wheat Flour	12	Chhatank
Dal	01	”
Green Vegetable	03	”
Masala (Spice)	1/2	”
Ghee	1	”

- (2) The decisions of the *Kisan Panchayats* regarding mutual and communal dispute and criminal cases such as abusing,

personal assaults and damage to crops by live-stocks would be acceptable to the *thikana*. Some reforms in the existing judicial system of *thikana* were also agreed upon.

- (3) A committee would be constituted to decide the rates of produce, on which the traders would purchase the produce twice a year at the time of land-revenue collection. Half of the members would be peasant.
- (4) The *thikana* would pay rupees thirty per month for the education of peasants through *Kisan panchayats*, which the *panchayat* can expend on its will, but the account would be submitted to the *thikana* every two months, but the literature prohibited by the Mewar State would not be taught.
- (5) The holdings of any peasant would not be seized untill the same had no legitimate owner or the land revenue of the same becomes due for three years without any proper reason.
- (6) If the crops are damaged due to natural calamity, interest will not be charged on the amount of land revenue for six months. Thereafter the rate of interest would be one per cent for the next six months.
- (7) The *thikana* would make proper arrangements for watch and ward. The *thikana* would appoint five sipahis (constable) and five *sawars* (horsemen) for *Chowkidari*.
- (8) When any peasant shall be asked by the *thikana* for security in some matter then not only the money-lender but any gentle peasant can be a surety.
- (9) All the cases filed against the peasants during the agitation would generally be withdrawn. The lands which were seized or allotted to others would be returned to the legitimate owners. Accordingly the peasant would also withdraw their case filed against the *thikana* officials during the agitation.
- (10) Sufficient pasture land would be provided in each village for grazing the cattle.
- (11) The trees grown in the holdings of the peasants would be his personal property. He would be free to use them without paying any revenue or cess.

- (12) Land revenue would not be charged on the land which was left uncultivated by the peasants in protest during the *Sambat* 1975-1977 (Year 1918-1920).
- (13) The land-revenue would not be charged on the land used for *bara* (courtyard) for cattle.
- (14) The reserved forest of *Baijnathji-ka-Dara* would be ended. And the land reserve in the Harjipura forest can be used by the peasants for grazing the cattle and getting wood.
- (15) The punishment of *Khora* (stock) would be totally abolished
- (16) The *thikana* would announce to the peasants as to which reserved forests would be open to them to cut grass and fire-wood for their personal use. If any peasant exceeded the limit of his personal necessity. he would be penalised.
- (17) The first collection would be of the land revenue from the produce of peasants. The decree of other debt would be executed only when it is found that the peasants have sufficient produce to serve his family upto next crop after paying the land revenue. The following items would not be seized or forfeited or auctioned to execute the decree :
  - (a) Clothes of his family, cooking utensils, and the ornaments of women which can not be taken off due to religious tradition.
  - (b) Agricultural implements, cattle and grain essential for his living.
  - (c) House and other buildings and the things within these which are essential for his use.
- (18) The peasant would be free to cut the bushes and wood for fencing the farms and agricultural use even without the permission of the *thikana*.
- (19) The *thikana* would arrange the free distribution of medicines upto the cost of Rs. 20 per month.
- (20) The Rao agreed that the terms of the agreement would also be applied to the peasants of the petty Jagirdars of his *thikana*.

- (21) The *Noot-Barar* cess which was levied on the occasion of marriage of Jagirdar and other family members would not be forced but would remain voluntary.
- (22) The peasants would consider it their social duty to provide means of communication, carrier, servant labour and food-stuffs on proper payment to the visitors to their villages. The cost and fare will be decided by the *Sarpanch* of the village concerned. If for some special reason the help is not provided force would not be used.
- (23) A number of cesses were to be exempted and lessened for which a list was prepared and it was decided that the land revenue for future would be fixed after a new settlement. The new settlement would be based on general rules. Only those cesses would be charged alongwith the land revenue which are being charged in the British provinces too.

The *Talwar bandhai* and *Chhatund* cess would remain unaffected by settlement.

Till the new settlement is made the  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the land revenue fixed according the old contract system would be charged. All the arccars of land revenue which are due for last years would be charged in three annual instalments.

When the new settlement is finalised and if the amount of land revenue is found more than the amount paid the difference would be charged from the peasants and in case it is less the difference would be returned to the peasants.

- (24) The total amount to be charged would be Rs. 2,225/- instead of Rs. 6,300/- per annum and after the new settlement this amount would be included in the land revenue.
- (25) The work for new settlement would be begun from 1st October, 1922.
- (26) Land revenue would be charged in British Indian coins and *batta* (discount) would be taken on the prevailing rate at Mandalgarh and Bijolia.

The above agreement was accepted by the representatives of *thikana* on 11th June, 1922. The agreement was a great victory for the peasants of Bijolia.

The above agreement shows that the grievances of peasants related to various aspects were properly touched by this agreement. Provisions of medical aid and education were made in this agreement. The judicial, police and Jail reforms were the signs of modern age. The authorities recognised the *Kisan Panchayat* as an important representative body of the peasants. The *panchayat* was entrusted with many powers and functions. The provisions for abolition of *begar*, exemption and reduction of cesses, peasants' rights on natural products and use of forest for grazing and fire wood were of great importance as these provisions paved the way for economic progress. The agreement for new settlement on general rules meant the reduction of arbitrary feudal control over the lands. Moreover, the Bijolia movement became a pioneering movement not only in Mewar State but all over Rajasthan, which encouraged the peasants to fight against feudal bondage.

During the second phase of the Bijolia peasant movement the peasants of all parts of Udaipur State arose in rebellion. It is pertinent to study these movements which were considerably influenced by this phase. These not only succeeded in awakening the peasant masses but also provided strength to the Bijolia movement. The growth of the peasant movements in other parts of Udaipur State compelled the British, State and *thikana* authorities to concede the demands of Bijolian peasants. The other peasant movements of Udaipur State which arose under the influence of Bijolia were as follows :

### Peasant Agitation in the Khalsa Area

The conditions of peasants in the *Khalsa* area were better in comparison to the peasants of Jagirs but the peasants of *Khalsa* were not free from feudal exploitation. In 1921 the peasants of the *Khalsa* area from various parts of Udaipur State organised themselves through their caste *Panchayats* and launched an agitation. There were many factors which gave impetus to the peasants of the *Khalsa* area to fight against the State authorities. Among these factors the influence of the Bijolia movement was very prominent.

During the Bijolia agitation the peasants of Bijolia left the lands of *thikana* uncultivated in protest and for their livelihood



they cultivated the lands in the *Khalsa* areas. The peasants of these areas were impressed by the agitating *Bijolian Kisans*. They also decided to organise themselves on the pattern of the *Bijolia* movement.<sup>55</sup> The leaders of *Bijolia* thought that the *Bijolia* movement would be isolated if it was not linked with the peasant masses of other parts of Udaipur State. To earn the support of the peasants of other parts Pathik reached them through *Rajasthan Seva Sangh*. The year 1920 was the year of national upheaval under the influence of the Non-Cooperation Movement. The peasants of *Bijolia* and other parts attended the Nagpur session of Congress with Vijay Singh Pathik. They were inspired by the programme drawn up by the Indian National Congress. This proved a second important factor which encouraged the peasants of other parts of Udaipur State. Inspiration drawn from the Russian Revolution also prepared the peasants psychologically. The effects of the 1st World War further worsened the conditions of the peasants. All these factors compelled the peasant to agitate.

In April 1921 hundreds of Jat peasants from different parts assembled at Udaipur to submit their memorandum to the Maharana of Udaipur. They put their demands before the Maharana regarding land rights, heavy land revenue, cesses, tribute and forced labour. With above memorandum the peasant deputation threatened the state authorities that they would not cultivate the lands until they received a satisfactory answer.<sup>56</sup> Upto the end of May 1921 a number of peasant deputations presented their grievances before the Maharana. The above method on the one side furthered the cause of peasants and on the other it organised the peasants. The caste *panchayats* which were in existence from the time immemorial were activated during this period. Previously these *panchayats* were concerned with social matters and worked as the custodians of the social norms, customs and traditions. The *panchayats* were empowered to outcaste any person who acted contrary to the social norms. Obviously, they exercised great powers over the communities. The peasant leaders like Manik Lal Verma and Vijay Singh Pathik involved the caste *panchayats* in economic struggle and they built up a strong peasant movement.

In December, 1921 a meeting was held at *Pandoli* village to spread the *Kisan Andolan* in the other parts of Udaipur State. Infact it was a *Kisan Sammelan* in which *panchas* of caste *panchayats*, representatives of *Rajasthan Seva Sangh* and the Secretary of *Rajputana-Madhyabharat Sabha* assembled.<sup>57</sup> In this conference it was decided that the peasants should be united in the Bijolian manner. The assembled persons were assigned to propagate the Bijolia movement in their areas. It was also agreed upon that the next *sammelan* would be held at Matrikundia fair where large number of peasants used to assemble every year. In May 1922 on the occasion of Matrikundia fair the Second *Kisan Sammelan* was held. In this conference it was decided that high rate of land revenue, cesses and forced labour system should be opposed. It was also decided that the five *panchas* of every district would approach the Maharana to mitigate their miseries.<sup>58</sup> They also agreed upon to send a circular to the caste *panchayats* of each village for refusal of land revenue until their demands were conceded. Any one who did anything contrary to this decision would be outcasted for twelve years.<sup>59</sup> This movement could not catch on because organisational weaknesses. In all the above conferences no formal organisation was formed which could become the nucleus. It was not practical to continue the movements all over Udaipur State with the help of local caste *panchayats* of different castes. However, the above efforts were not entirely fruitless. On the one hand these efforts gave encouragement to the Bijolia movement and on the other they succeeded in getting some relief regarding cesses and forced labour. When the agitating activities began in the *Khalsa* area the State tried to keep the peasants aloof from the peasant movements of *thikanas*. The State announced some concession and assured the peasants to reduce land revenue of pacify them.

### Movements in Other Thikanas

Under the direct influence of the Bijolia movement the peasants of the *thikanas* of Parsoli, Bhainsrodgarh, Basi, Mandesra and Begun arose against the policies of their respective *thikanas*. As has already been mentioned, the conditions of the peasants of Jagirs or *thikanas* were quite deplorable and the peasants were victims of feudal oppression in its most crude and naked form. The

Bijolia movement inspired the peasants of other feudatories. The peasant movements of other *thikanas* were crushed mercilessly. Only the movement in *thikana* Begun got prominence as the peasants of this also resisted for a long time and ultimately they got an agreement similar to the Bijolian peasants. Here it is relevant to narrate the peasant movement of Begun feudatories.

Begun was a neighbouring Jagir of Bijolia and the majority of peasants was also of Dhakar caste. The peasants also organised themselves on the model of Bijolia. In 1922 a no-rent campaign was also launched in Begun but it was suppressed by the cruel Jagirdar. The peasants of Begun approached the leaders of *Rajasthan Seva Sangh* for help and support. The Secretary of the *Sangh* Ram Narain Choudhary was sent to guide and help the peasants of Begun.<sup>60</sup> He went to Udaipur and approached the Prime Minister, who assured him to conduct an enquiry into the matter, but it was not conducted until the end of 1922. As the *Rajasthan Seva Sangh* was trying to spread the movement of peasants in all parts of Udaipur State, the *Sangh* considering the present situation, decided to concentrate on Begun.

The Mewar Government threatened the Jagirdar of Begun that he should either put an end to the *Kisan* agitation through any means or he might be deprived of his powers and the Jagir would be brought under the direct management of State.<sup>61</sup> The Jagirdar entered into an agreement with the peasants at Ajmer through Vijay Singh Pathik, but the agreement was not acceptable to the British Resident of Mewar as he called it a Bolshevik settlement. The Jagirdar of Begun was summoned to Udaipur by the State and British authorities and the Jagir was put under the State management in March, 1923.<sup>62</sup> The peasants were insisting that the new officers should accept the Ajmer agreement. The new officers who were posted to pacify the peasants failed in pacifying the peasants. In fact this time the powers of the State were transferred to Maharaj Kumar Bhupal Singh who proved to be a puppet in the hands of British. He and his officials could not dare to make any settlement without the permission of their British lords. In June 1923 Udaipur State constituted an enquiry commission under G. C. Trench, the Settlement Commissioner of the State, for settlement with the peasants of Begun. On 13th June, 1923 the said commission reached Begun.

The centre of the movement of Begun was a village, Raita, while the Trench commission was stationed at Begun. The Commission asked the peasants to appear before the Commission at Begun, but the peasants refused to appear before the Commission as they insisted that the Commission should camp at Raita. The stands of both sides created a deadlock and no settlement could be reached. The peasants boycotted the Commission and the Commission arbitrarily prepared a decision. In this decision Vijay Singh Pathik was charged with the allegation of inducing seditious spirit among the peasants and establishing a parallel Government. The *Kisan Panchayat* charged with illegal activities and it was also decided that the prevailing land revenue, cesses and *begars* were justified.<sup>63</sup> The decision was sent to the *panchayat* on 10th July, 1923. The *panchayat* was not supposed to think over on it as the decision was full of threats.<sup>64</sup> After receiving it, the *panchayat* gave a warning that until the police was withdrawn it would not be possible to accept the decision.<sup>65</sup>

In fact the *panchayat* ignored the Commission and continued their campaign without any fear. On 12th July, 1913, a large meeting of peasants was held at a village, Govindpura. The purpose of this meeting was said to discuss the decision sent by the commission. It was also propagated that the Settlement Commissioner, Trench, would be present to discuss the grievances of the peasants at this meeting. This meeting attracted a large number of people including women and children. On this occasion the *Navyuwak Mandal* also called their members for annual function. This programme further added the strength of youths to the gathering of Govindpura.<sup>66</sup> The assembly of peasants at Govindpura encouraged the leaders and activities of the *Kisan Panchayat* and the leaders decided that their meeting would be continued until their demands were conceded.<sup>67</sup>

The above activities intensified the movement still more vigorously. The situation alarmed the State and British authorities. The Government of India was pressing Udaipur State hard to suppress the peasant movement of Begun with military power. The British authorities were afraid that a long drawn-out movement might spread all over Rajputana and could engulf the British provinces nearby. They again and again designated

the peasant movements of Udaipur State as "Bolshevik" revolution.<sup>68</sup> There were also some other reasons which pressed the British to think of taking repressive measures to deal with this movement. This movement was not an isolated one. This was preceded and followed by such movements not only in Mewar and Rajasthan but in other areas of the country. Under the influence of the Non-Cooperation Movement these type of movements arose in large parts of the United Provinces of Agra and Awadh, in Punjab, Bihar and Kerla. Most of these movements were spontaneous and there was a possibility of conversion of these into united peasant revolutions in India. It must, however, be admitted that the fear of the British was not baseless. The leaders of the movements knew about the Russian Revolution and they referred to it in their speeches. Therefore, any movement of Bolshevik nature caused fear among the British and they wanted to put an end to it. By this time the Chouri-Choura incident and the suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement had changed the British attitude towards the peasant movement. Now, the Government decided to suppress the peasantry instead of pacifying them.

Mr. G. C. Trench, the Settlement Commissioner of Udaipur State, reached Govindpura at about 5 A.M. on 13th July, 1923 with State troops. He again warned the leaders to accept the decision of the Commission. The leaders refused the decision strongly. The troops encircled the village and firing was resorted to. Two activists Roopa, of village Jainagar and Kripa, of Amarapura, were shot dead. On the Government records one man lost his life, about 25 men were wounded and 485 men were arrested.<sup>69</sup> According to the newspaper *Tarun Rajasthan*, eleven men lost their lives, about hundred were wounded, and 540 were arrested along with women and children.<sup>70</sup> The women were treated in a humiliating manner. The *panchayat* office at Raita was raided and all the papers were seized. All the activities of *panchayat* were banned. Through this action the authorities succeeded in suppressing the peasant movement of Begun.

Vijay Singh Pathik was perturbed with this incident and he himself decided to come to Begun to review and revitalise the movement. Immediately after this incident he came to Begun,

although his entry was banned in the territory of Udaipur State. There he worked secretly and built-up the no-rent movement again. on the advise of Pathik the *Kisan Panchayat* decided that these persons who paid revenue to the *thikana* would be socially boycotted. It was also announced that no marital relations would be established with them. The *Mahajans* were also boycotted by the peasants as they were in close co-operation with the *thikana*. The *panchayat* also opened its own shops.<sup>71</sup> The revived activities of Pathik alarmed the authorities and they decided to arrest him. On 10th September, 1923 Pathik was arrested. He was tried by a special court and was sentenced to three and a half years imprisonment and fined Rs. 1,500/-.<sup>72</sup> With the arrest of Pathik the movement of Begun lost the momentum. The *thikana* authorities started collecting the land revenue forcibly which was due for three years. Though the movement was crushed down yet this brought about some changes in the conditions of peasants. The new settlement was started in Begun in December, 1923 under the pressure of this movement.

In 1922 the Bhils of Mewar and other States also arose under the leadership of Motilal Tejawat. Initially the *Bhils* were impressed with the Bijolia movement. This movement has been discussed separately.

### Third Phase

The agreement of February 1922 was not implemented by the authorities due to their changing attitude towards the peasant movements. By the end of 1923 the peasant uprisings in other parts were put to an end with repressive measures, which encouraged the British, State and *thikana* authorities to deal with the peasants cruelly. The arrest of Vijay Singh Pathik gave a severe set-back to the peasant movement of Bijolia. The *thikana* paid no attention to implement the agreement.

The changing attitude of the authorities caused great hardship among the peasants. During the period 1923-1926 there was draught and famine in Bijolia. The land revenue and cesses were collected. This state of affair further worsened the conditions of the peasants and they became heavily indebted to the money-lenders. The *Kisan Panchayat* made a number of petitions for

relief, but the authorities ignored them. In fact the authorities succeeded in keeping the movement under strict control. Vijay Singh Pathik was in prison and the second leader Manik Lal Verma was not able to launch a fresh agitation.

Vijay Singh Pathik was released on 28th April, 1927 under an order in which his re-entry in Mewar was forbidden.<sup>73</sup> By this time Manik Lal Verma detached himself from the Bijolia movement as differences arose between him and Pathik. Vijay Singh Pathik planned a course of action for peasant agitation at Bijolia. On 18th May Pathik met the leaders of *Kisan Panchayat* at Singoli in Gwalior territory. He was enthusiastically received. Vijay Singh Pathik advised the *Kisan Panchayat* to give up non-irrigated holdings as a protest against the increase of land revenue and also to boycott state schools and start their own as a protest against official attacks on their independence. The members of the Panchayat gave a pledge to observe truth and non-violence, to wear khadi, to abstain from intoxicants and to maintain the *panchayat* at all costs. Literate girls took a pledge each to teach three girls to read and write. A ceremony was carried out at which men who, as a token of devotion to Pathik had not cut their hair for the last four years, cut their hair.<sup>74</sup>

In the month of June 1927 the peasants started sending their conditional resignations from their unirrigated holdings.<sup>75</sup> The *thikana* took strong exception of this decision. The peasant considered the resignations as an effective measure of protest. They were also of firm belief that this step would again compel the *thikana* to accept their demands. But, this time the *thikana* decided to crush this movement without granting any concession. The peasants complained that the *thikana* had violated the agreement of 1922. The land revenue fixed for the unirrigated land was very high. They further complained that the *thikana* authorities were interfering in the affairs of their education, *panchayat* and *khadi*.<sup>76</sup> In protest the peasant *panchayat* of Bijolia submitted collective resignation of peasants from unirrigated land. The *thikana* did not accept the collective resignation. It was the view of the authorities that the acceptance of collective resignation would intensify the agitation and to break their unity the *thikana* asked the peasants to submit their resignations individually. The peasants then submitted their individual resignations and the same were accepted

by the *thikana*. The *thikana* decided to allot the surrendered land to the other peasants. The Dhakar peasants impended this process by threatening that "they will obtain possession of the surrendered holdings and that those who take them will lose their money".<sup>77</sup> The peasants of other castes also co-operated with the Dhakar peasants and refused to take the surrendered land. The *thikana* authorities tried to their best to break the unity of peasants on caste basis, but could not succeed.

In fact by this time the class consciousness had attained a certain level among the peasants. The surrendered lands remained unoccupied as no peasant of other caste accepted these. The authorities were determined to allot these lands to others and they persuaded the Mahajans to take possession of these. The surrendered lands were allotted to the *Mahajans* and *Bapidari* (permanent occupancy) rights were conferred on them.<sup>78</sup> The *thikana* allotted 8,000 bighas of surrendered land to the new *Bapidars* upto 1930.<sup>79</sup> This action of the *thikana* disheartened the peasants and induced uneasiness among them. The peasants tried to get their land evicted from the new occupants by force but they could not succeed as troops were stationed in every village to protect the new occupants.<sup>80</sup>

The *Kisan Panchayat* was disillusioned by the new situation. Differences arose among the leaders of the Bijolia movement which further weakened the movement. In 1930 the leadership passed into the hands of Jamnalal Bajaj and Haribhau Upadhyay who were unknown among the peasants. After 1930 the peasant movement of Bijolia gradually declined and was concentrated on the demand for the return of their surrendered lands. This was also due to the view of the Congress regarding the princely states. The new leaders were the supporters of the official line of Gandhi and the Indian National Congress. Obviously, under the changed leadership the peasant movement of Bijolia lost its spirit. The peasant got their surrendered lands in 1939 when they became aloof from all the political activities and assured the *thikana* that they would never go on agitation in future.<sup>81</sup>

The Bijolia peasant movement which continued nearly for half a century met a very adverse end due to various reasons. The movement had remained limited to the local level. Though



efforts were made to co-ordinate this movement with the national stream but the Congress leadership acted to the contrary. It was easy for the authorities to crush an isolated movement. When in 1938 the Congress supported the freedom struggle of the princely state and advised them to form Praja Mandal in the States, they aimed at a movement for a responsible government. The national leadership never supported the peasant struggles. During the early phase of the Bijolia movement the feudal elements did not take it much seriously but during last phase they openly confronted the peasants.

The Bijolia Peasant movement could not attain its ultimate goal but it did succeed in infusing anti-feudal consciousness among the peasants of Rajasthan. It also proved a severe attack on feudalism. It also inspired and encouraged such type of movements in the other parts of Rajasthan. This prepared the ground for mass struggle and social development. Considering the above points, the importance of the Bijolia peasant movement is obvious.

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## BHIL MOVEMENT UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF MOTILAL TEJAWAT

The tribal movement under the leadership of Govindgir was confined to the States of Dungarpur, Banswara, Sunthampur and Idar only. A large number of Bhils in the States of Udaipur, Sirohi and Bundi remained aloof from this movement. The movement of the Bhils under the leadership of Govindgir was suppressed by the British forces, but it influenced the Bhils of Gujarat, Central India and Rajasthan. The British authorities advised these States to adopt precautionary measures to prevent Bhil movements. They were also advised that to pacify the Bhils certain reforms in regard of forest rules, land revenue and *begar* should be made. But things remained at the level of correspondence only and nothing substantial was done. The conditions of Bhils were worsening instead of improving. Their discontentment was reflected in various agitations. Between 1913-20 many agitations arose but all were suppressed. These agitations were also influenced by the Bijolia peasant movement but could not develop on the same line due to various reasons.

These movements were spontaneous, isolated and unorganised. Obviously, in the absence of proper leadership these movements could not gain momentum.

In the wake of the Non-Co-operation Movement the Bhils of Mewar and other States rose under the leadership of Moti Lal Tejawat in 1921. Moti Lal Tejawat was Oswal bania by caste and belonged to village Koliari in Jharole *thikana* of Udaipur State. He worked as *Kamdar* in Jharole *thikana* for some time.

During this period he came in contact with the Bhils of that *thikana*. Due to some differences with the Jagirdar of Jharole he left the service of *thikana* and adopted the profession of a spice merchant. He sold spices around the villages in the Bhil tract and was a regular visitor to Chitre-Vichitre fair held every month at Samalia under Poshina *thikana*. Further, his business brought him in close contact with all the Bhils of Udaipur State. He was aggrieved by the plight of the Bhils and started work among them for their upliftment. He worked for social reforms in the beginning and his preachings in the main were as follows.<sup>1</sup>

- (i) Liquor shall not be drunk.
- (ii) A man shall not marry a brother's widow by force.
- (iii) No woman whose husband is living shall marry another man.
- (iv) Abduction of an unmarried woman shall be punishable by heavy fine.
- (v) A widow can re-marry at her own free will.
- (vi) No money shall be taken on the occasion of the marriage of an unmarried woman.
- (vii) A woman guilty of illicit intercourse with a man shall be excommunicated.
- (viii) No Bhil shall eat the flesh of cattle.
- (ix) No Bhil shall commit theft.

The social reform activities of Moti Lal Tejawat spread his popularity among the Bhils. Along with these he also started *Eki* (Unity) movement. The *Eki* movement aimed at a united opposition to all types of exploitation of Bhils by the States and Jagirdars. \*The Bhils were also preached that they were the natural owners of the soil and they had been ill-treated by the authorities. The Bhils were also advised that they should remain aloof from the State's and Jagirdar's courts because these were founded on injustice. All the above ideas and preachings induced a new life and consciousness among the Bhils. Though the activities of Moti Lal Tejawat were limited around the Jharole Jagir but his influence was spreading rapidly in other Bhil tracts also. His

growing influence alarmed the authorities and to accept the challenge the authorities took rigorous measures which increased the oppressive power of the authorities upon the Bhils. Moti Lal Tejawat met Vijay Singh Pathik and other leaders to chalk out a programme for redressal of the grievances of the Bhils. He was highly influenced by the Non-Co-operation Movement at the national level and he also wanted to launch such type of movement of the Bhils. By this time the Bijolia peasant movement had also reached to its climax which inspired Tejawat and when he got the assurance of support from the leaders of Bijolia he finalised his programme.<sup>2</sup> In the month of July, 1921 he gave a call for the non-cooperation movement to the Bhils along with the call of no-rent campaign.<sup>3</sup>

Moti Lal Tejawat's call received proper response which resulted in a powerful Bhil movement. Major Sutton, Assistant Political Superintendent of Kotra, wrote about the activities of Tejawat during this movement thus: "Motilal is a follower of Mahatma Gandhi and he tells the people that when Gandhi becomes supreme they would only have to pay one anna in the rupee and that if they refused to follow him they would be crushed."<sup>4</sup> This mischievous remark showed the uneasiness of the British resulting from fear of the Bhil movement. But it is also a fact that Tejawat launched this movement under the influence and name of Gandhi. The Bhils of Jharole *thikana* refused to pay land revenue, cesses, taxes and to do *begar*. This was the main centre of Tejawat's activities.

The *Thakur* of Jharole alarmed by the situation and with a view to bringing under control he arrested Moti Lal Tejawat on 19th August, 1921.<sup>5</sup> The arrest of Tejawat provoked the Bhils and thousand of Bhils assembled to get their leader released. The huge gathering of the Bhils compelled the *Thakur* to release Tejawat. Tejawat now intensified his movement and he gave call from village to village by beating drums not to pay the taxes and to observe non-co-operation with the authorities. The Bhils took an oath to obey the decisions of Tejawat. They also decided that if some one disobeyed he would be punished by outcasting him or by imposing fines.<sup>6</sup> These decisions were taken by the Bhils who belonged to the Jharole Jagir but the Bhils of Bhumat were also

taking the same line. Bhumat was the area densely populated by the Bhils. It comprised of parts of various Jagirs and the *Khalsa* land of Udaipur State. To keep the Bhils under control the British formed Bhumat an administrative unit under the rule of a military officer of the rank of a Major with headquarters at Kotra and Kherwara. Tejawat toured the Bhumat area to extend his activities and he became very popular there. It was the belief of the Bhils that Tejawat was a holy emissary of Gandhi. They even regarded him as a blessing of God and a large number of Bhil population flocked to meet him. They took the oath to fight under his leadership and they showed dedication to him by placing their lives at his disposal. The Bhils followed him honestly and they refused to pay land revenue, cesses, other taxes and to perform *begar*. They also started using natural products without permission. The administration became paralysed and lost control over a large tract of Udaipur State inhabited by the Bhil population. For instance when the officials of Jharole Jagir were collecting the revenue, Moti Lal Tejawat reached there with a strength of two thousand Bhils and seized the collected amount of revenue the officials were beaten and taken as hostage.<sup>7</sup>

The *Maharana* and British authorities feared the growing influence of Tejawat and the Udaipur Government ordered on 31st December, 1921 that the Jagirdars of Bhumat should not allow any meeting attended by more than 50 persons without written permission. Along with this order the State also announced a reward of Rs. 500/- for the arrest of Moti Lal Tejawat.<sup>8</sup> The State also announced that any one giving shelter or assistance to him would be liable to punishment.<sup>9</sup>

The above measures taken by Udaipur state failed to control the situation. By this time the Bhil movement had acquired a strong mass base. The Bhils continued their resistance. Moti Lal Tejawat entered Sirohi State in January, 1922, where a large number of Bhils resided. They were also impressed with his activities at Udaipur and they wanted to launch a similar movement in Sirohi. In fact Tejawat did not flee from Udaipur due to any fear of Udaipur authorities but he was invited by the Bhils of Sirohi. He was also confident that his followers of Udaipur were capable of continuing the movement in his absence. During January and April, 1922 the Udaipur State, British authorities



and Jagirdars of Bhumat announced various concessions to Bhils regarding land revenue, *begar*, cesses and other taxes which, however, were not acceptable to the Bhils. On many pretexts they refused to pay the land revenues and other taxes and continued to defy the authorities.

There was a reason behind the non-acceptance of the concessions. After launching the movement, Tejawat entered Idar State (Gujarat) in the month of March, 1922. When Moti Lal Tejawat was staying at Pol in Idar State with his 2000 followers the Mewar Bhil crops under Major Sutton encircled him on 7th March 1922 and opened fire. The government sources mentioned that 22 men of Tejawat's group were killed and 29 were wounded.<sup>10</sup> This incident compelled the Bhils to intensify their movement. Again, in June 1922 a fresh agreement was concluded between the *Gamets* and Jagirdars of Bhumat. But this agreement also could not succeed in bringing the movement to an end because various disputes arose in the implementation of agreement. The Bhil movement of Udaipur State finally ended after 1929 when Tejawat was arrested.

Sirohi State became the second important centre of the Bhil movement under the leadership of Moti Lal Tejawat. The condition of the Bhils in Sirohi State were also similar to that of the Bhils of Udaipur State. In January, 1922 Tejawat entered Sirohi State. Here he also started social reforms among the Bhils on the Udaipur Model. Along with social reforms an economic struggle was also launched for the emancipation of the tribals. To achieve social and economic goals *Eki* was organised. Tejawat addressed a number of meetings of Bhils and Garassias in January 1922 and openly called them not to pay the revenue and to disobey the State authorities. The message of Tejawat was owned by the Bhils and Garassias of Sirohi honestly and religiously. In the last week of January, 1922 a number of incidents of looting and assault on officials by the tribe men were reported. Hence, they became violent.

Rama Kant Malviya, son of the national leader Madan Mohan Malviya, was the Dewan of Sirohi State. He used his father's goodwill to check the tribal movement. He might have been liberal towards the tribals but his class interests were

contrary to them. Rama Kant Malviya also approached Mahatma Gandhi and invited Vijay Singh Pathik, leader of Bijolia and President of Rajasthan Seva Sangh, to settle the matter.<sup>11</sup> Mahatma Gandhi sent Manilal Kothari to Sirohi and he approached Tejawat to give up the violent movement.<sup>12</sup> All these efforts proved futile because it was not possible to pacify the Bhils and Garassias without giving concessions. The State decided to crush the movement through military action on the advice of the British. The military action of 7 March, 1922 at Pol in Idar State was the first step in this direction. In fact the Non-Co-operation Movement was called off in February 1922 and the British authorities crushed down other movements of peasants and tribals all over India. Though these movements were not sponsored by the Indian National Congress, but they emerged under the influence of Gandhi and his Non-Co-operation movement. With the withdrawal of the Non-Co-operation Movement the movements of down trodden masses lost moral support. Ramakant Malviya tried to put down the tribal movement of Sirohi with the help of Gandhi and the leaders of *Rajasthan Seva Sangh*. But with the failure of his efforts he got irritated and decided to send State troops to Siawa, a leading village of Garassias to collect the States dues.<sup>13</sup> The State troops attacked the said village on 12th April, 1922. In this operation many Garassias lost their lives and a heavy loss was done by the forces by burning the houses, grain and cattle.<sup>14</sup> The military operations continued. On 5th May, 1922 the troops attacked Valoria village and a major portion of this village was burnt and eleven tribals lost their lives.<sup>15</sup> On 6th May the villages of Bhula and Nauapas were attacked and most of the huts of these villages were burnt.<sup>16</sup>

These military operations it is obvious, were meant to terrorise the tribals. The Indian National Congress did not notice it. It was the *Rajasthan Seva Sangh* which took a serious view of it and appointed Ram Narain Choudhary and Satya Bhakta to enquire into the incidents.<sup>17</sup> The *Seva Sangh* gave wide publicity to the report prepared by Ram Narain Choudhary and Satya Bhakta. The workers of *Seva Sangh* established their relations with some members of the British Parliament who belonged to the Labour Party.<sup>18</sup> They used to send all important statements, reports and *purchase* to them. When the questions were asked

in the Parliament by the Labour Members then the Government of India and States concerned were contacted. This incident was also brought up in the British Parliament by the *Rajasthan Seva Sangh*.

The military operations shocked the moral courage of Bhils and Garassias. The *Panchas* (Headmen) of the affected villages reached the Dewan of State and expressed their willingness to break the oath of *Eki* and in his presence they denounced the *Eki*.<sup>19</sup> It was observed by the authorities that the tribals gave up the *Eki* movement tactically and the possibilities of renewal of this movement existed there. The officials and Chief Minister suggested to the ruler of Sirohi State to grant some concessions to the tribals so that final peace could be achieved. On 23rd May 1922 the Maharao of Sirohi announced the following concessions.<sup>20</sup>

- (1) General pardon was given to the agitators.
- (2) People whose houses were burnt were exempted from the State demand for the current crop and small arrears of rainy crop were remitted.
- (3) Permission was granted for bringing grass and wood from the forest for re-erecting huts.
- (4) The State revenue was converted in the case of villages of Bhula and Navabs etc., from 1/6th of the crop to Rs. 8/- per plough and in the case of Valoria, etc., from 1/7th of the crop to Rs. 7/- per plough.
- (5) The State revenue of the rain crop was not to be realised from the minor sons of the persons who were killed in action until they grew up and were able to cultivate for themselves.
- (6) Old widows having no substantial means of support and who cultivated small pieces of land by begging support from others were exempted from payment of revenue.
- (7) Cultivators having hired ploughs were to pay revenue at half the rate.
- (8) Separate *Sukhri* lag on the rain crop was discontinued.
- (9) Compulsion of giving goats and *Dasehra Lag* was done away with in favour of voluntary presentation of a hegoat per village.

- (10) The office of *Patwari* was abolished in these villages due to the conversion of revenue into cash.
- (11) The tax on bringing wood on head from outside the territory was abolished.
- (12) Restriction on bringing pieces of wood from the forest for the purpose of making ploughs was abolished.
- (13) The cultivators were permitted to pay the state share of the summer crop as hitherto, and also to pay the state share of the winter crop if they cultivated the same.
- (14) A committees of 4 persons comprising one Bhil, one Garassia, one Mahajan and one Brahmin was appointed to look into the cases of stolen cattle.
- (15) A special procedure involving maintenance of written record on prescribed format and counter checking by the *Tehsildar* was to be laid down to stop the harrassment of the cultivators on false charges.

The above concessions given to the military affected area were also extended to other parts of the State where tribals inhabited in large numbers. The concessions given were not of much value. The issues of *begar*, *lag-bag*, Forest rule were not even touched under these concessions. In the beginning of 1923 Moti Lal Tejawat again tried to organise the *Ek* to continue the agitation but due to the persuation and efforts of the State officials the agitation could not be renewed. In 1927 a final agreement was concluded between the head *Panchas* of Bhils and Garassias and State officials. The tribal movement of Sirohi came to end finally in 1929 when Tejawat was arrested.

✓ The Bhil and Garassias of Udaipur and Sirohi States remained turbulent during 1921-23 under the leadership of Motilal Tejawat. The States and Jagirdars inflicted all sorts of tyranny upon the ignorant tribal men. A series of military attacks were let loose. After January 1924 Tejawat went underground as the States concerned-announced rewards for his arrest. It was the view of the authorities that without rounding up Tejawat the tribal movement could not be put down. Moti Lal Tejawat was arrested by the police of Idar State on 3rd June, 1929 at a village Khed Brahma.<sup>21</sup> He was handed over to Udaipur State

where criminal proceedings were started against him. No final decision could be made in this case and upto 1936 he remained in jail. He was released on 23rd April, 1936 and he gave an undertaking that he would not do any agitational work and would not leave Udaipur without permission.<sup>22</sup> Udaipur State sanctioned a monthly allowance of Rs. 30 to him.<sup>23</sup> Again he was arrested in 1945 on violating the undertaking when he tried to enter the Bhumat area and was released in February, 1947.

The tribal movement under the leadership of Moti Lal Tejawat got prominence due to its nature. The movement began under the influence of the Non-Co-operation Movement but it was more radical in comparison with it. The tribal movement was not owned by the Indian National Congress due to its class character. This movement could not be integrated in the National movement, but it strengthened the national cause. The movement awakened the ignorant tribe men to break their age-old bondage. Through these movements they stepped into modern age. These movements proved severe attacks on the feudal system of Rajasthan and paved the way for social development. These also prepared the ground for freedom movement in Rajasthan and when the Prajamandal in various states came into being the awakened tribe men joined these organisation.

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## PEASANT AGITATIONS IN THE JAIPUR STATE

The peasants of Jaipur State lived in a state of destitution and penury under an extremely oppressive feudal system. The degrading condition of peasants led to unrest among them. This unrest was more widespread among the peasants of Jagir areas than in the *Khalsa*. The Shekhawati *Kisan Andolan* which started in 1921 in the Shekhawati area of Sikar and Jhunjhunu continued during the mid and late thirties. Another movement of importance was of *Bairwas* (Chamars) of *Thikana* Uniara which lasted from 1946 to 1949. After 1938 some minor stray movements of peasants arose in the Nizamats of Hindaun and Torawati under the leadership of Jaipur Raj Praja Mandal.

### Causes of the Peasant Agitation

Insecurity of land tenures was one of the main causes of the peasant unrest. In Jagir areas there were no definite rules and regulations for tilling the land by peasants. The rates of land revenue were not levied evenly during the period of the tenure, and enhancement could be made at any time.<sup>1</sup> The peasants always feared that they could be ejected at any time from their holdings.<sup>2</sup> Further, due to insecurity of land tenure peasants were not willing to make any permanent improvement in their holdings for raising the productivity of their land. They were of the view that their economic condition was worsening day by day due to the exploitative land revenue system. Under this system, they had no margin of profit for fulfilling their economic and social needs. There was no fixed land revenue and the *thikanas* imposed any

amount of rent according to their whims.<sup>3</sup> Those who are hungry must cry for bread, and those who are wronged must call for justice. This is an elemental truth which cannot fail to assert and reassert itself so long as hunger and injustice continue to exist. The poor cultivators often paid large sums of land revenue by pawning their sons and daughters to money-lenders or selling their sons to *Dadupanthi Sadhus*.<sup>4</sup> The most prevalent systems of assessment were *Kunt* and *Latara* under which a rough estimate of produce was made. The land revenue assessed under these systems was always high and sometimes it could not be met even with the whole produce. It was popularly known as *Lutera* (Robbing system) among the peasants.

State Records are full of instances of heavy land revenue assessment of peasants. Thus in the case of village Sisiyan<sup>5</sup> of *Nizamat* Shekhawati one Harlal was assessed by the *Thikanedar* on an estimated produce of 75 maunds, whereas the *Nizam* estimated the produce to be only 30 maunds, which yielded a sum of Rs. 47/12/- only when its rent was assessed to be Rs. 56/12/- which means that the cultivator had to pay from his own pocket Rs. 9/- in addition to giving the whole of the produce of the land—the result of his whole year's toll. The fluctuations in the rate of land revenue were ruinous for the peasants who favoured the introduction of a fixed rate of land revenue according to the nature of soil and produce. To free them from the fear of ejection and to raise the productivity of land the peasants demanded security of tenure through recognition of their hereditary tenancy rights<sup>6</sup> such as *Biswadari* rights.<sup>7</sup> No survey and settlement was carried out by the State and *thikanas* to find out the value of land. Even at places where the survey and settlement work had begun, it was not conducted properly. The peasant's demand for settlement was acceded to but by reducing the length of the *Jarib* (chain for land measurement), the authorities gave them with one hand and took it away with the other. This added fuel to the fire of agitation. The *thikanas* of Shekhawati had reduced the length of the chain to 82½ feet as compared to the State chain of 165 feet.<sup>8</sup> The vagueness of land revenue rules allowing exorbitant rents to be charged by *thikanadars* naturally created unrest among the peasants and provoked them to rise against the maladministration of the Jagirs and *thikanas*.



In case of scarcity of rain, bad harvest and famine no remission was allowed in land revenue, and whenever any remission was allowed, it used to be realised in full with interest in the next year.<sup>9</sup> The remission of revenue was always an issue of dispute between the *thikanas* and the peasantry. In normal years, the Jagirdars collected these arrears which was very burdensome to the peasantry.

In most of the wells of Shekhawati water was very deep and irrigation was scarcely possible. But all land around the well was classified as irrigated (*chahi*) land for the purpose of collecting the revenue and at the time of settlement it was mentioned as irrigated land irrespective of the fact whether the well could irrigate or not.<sup>10</sup>

The peasants were not allowed to use natural products grown on their holdings without paying taxes for them. It may be recalled here that Shekhawati was a one-crop area where peasants kept cattle as a substitute to meet their needs. They faced a great scarcity of fodder due to restrictions imposed on the use of fodder trees and grass. They could not cut the tree even for their agricultural implements.<sup>11</sup> All the pasture land or waste land was under the possession of the Jagirdars, and the peasants were provided no place where they could graze their cattle.<sup>12</sup>

There were one or more ponds (*Jo'ras*) in every village. A *Jhora* was a sort of depressed soil where water accumulated during rains and after drying up grass or other kinds of fodder cropped up there for the cattle.<sup>13</sup> In almost all cases, these plots were left uncultivated by the Jagirdars and *thikanas* as a sort of *Pun* or dedication for cattle grazing and drinking. In the beginning these ponds were the common property of the village and were free for grazing cattle. But after a certain time the Jagirdars started collecting grazing and drinking tax from the owners of cattle who used these ponds.<sup>14</sup> This handicapped the peasants in maintaining cattle as pasture land could not be used by them without paying the tax. Under these circumstances they demanded that *Guchara* lands (grazing land) should be made common to all and free access to these lands must be given to all those who had a right to use them.<sup>15</sup>

Receipts for payment of land revenue were not issued to the peasants and sometimes it was recovered twice.<sup>16</sup> Without a proper receipt, the peasants were unable to show their possession on land and when the land settlement started they feared that their holdings would not be entered in their *khatas* and *khataunis*.

In addition to rent the cultivators had to pay a large number of cesses (*lag-bags*) including cesses to meet the expenses of the landlords' (Jagirdars) marriage, guests, tours, pleasure trips, shooting excursion, etc.<sup>17</sup> Besides, the *lag-bags* such as *Pancharai*, *Khuntabandi*, *Chelli-Ginti*, *Bhains Ginti*, etc., were realised from the owners of cattle.<sup>18</sup> Generally these *lag-bags* were more than double of the land revenue. These were also realised from the cultivators, on the construction of house or court-yards, on the occasion of marriages of their sons and daughters, on *Nuktas* (death feast), etc. During the peasant agitation the demand for abolition of these *lag-bags* was one of the prominent demands. In the bulletin of *Shekhawati Kisan Jat Panchayat*, the Secretary wrote in July 1939 that the "*lag-bags*" are the main cause of their ruin. These are increasing constantly like the of *Sursa* Demon. They (cesses) are sucking their blood".

Levy of *Zakat* (custom duty) was also among the prominent causes of peasant unrest. There were two types of customs duties, viz., internal and external. Internal customs duty was charged on the goods or articles going from one village to another within a Jagir area,<sup>19</sup> while external customs duty was charged on goods or articles going from one *thikana* to another and from Jaipur territory to the other States. Obviously, there were numerous layers of customs duties imposed upon the cultivators. These octroi duties were charged in every *thikana* and were levied by the State as well.<sup>20</sup> During the time of famines and scarcities, these customs duties created obstacles for the peasants in importing grain and fodder. There existed a system of issuing the *Pola Khana* (customs duty exemption certificate) to cultivators. This system gave rise to corruption as the employees of the customs department generally did not issue *Pola Khanna* without gratification.<sup>21</sup> The *thikanas* and Jagirs also charged customs duties on the goods or articles on which the State did not levy any charge.<sup>22</sup> The method of realising these duties was very harsh and inhuman. About such methods

a leaflet entitled, "*Thikana Nawalgarh Ki Nadirshahi*" mentioned that :<sup>23</sup>

"The passengers at the railway station are harrassed to such an extent that they start weeping. Clothes worn on their body and other goods were checked and are thrown out here and there and after that the custom officials fix the duty according to their will. The clothes of women are searched in a humiliating manner."

These customs duties obviously had also created obstacles for the peasants in importing improved seeds, fertilisers, implements, livestock, etc., and also prevented them from selling their agricultural produce, ghee, etc., outside the village or the province in a bigger market where they could fetch fair prices. The customs duty and *lag-bags* disrupted the rural economy and social life and created unrest among the cultivators.

*Begar* (forced labour) was quite widespread in the State. Not only the state authorities, but every Jagirdar, *thikanedar* and *Bardar* took *begar* free from the poor cultivator for as many days as they liked. All the castes except the Rajputs, Kaimkhanis and Brahmins were compelled to do *begar*.<sup>24</sup> The nature of *begar* was very acute in non-Khalsa (*Thikanas* and *Jagirs*) areas of the State. In *thikanas* the *begar* continued to be exacted even after its prohibition by the *Darbar*.<sup>25</sup> The Principal *begars* were as follows : *Roti Khilai ki begar*, *Hal begar* (an impost on each cultivator for ploughing the Jagirdar's land free of cost), *Lasta begar* (an impost on cultivators for reaping the crop of Jagirdar), *Korad begar* (body labour free of charge for carrying the Jagirdar's crops to his store), *Dhulai begar* (when the Jagirdars had to send some articles outside or get certain things from elsewhere, he ordered one camel from each house, who did not own camels had to pay a cash penalty), *Chakar begar* (when Jagirdar needed servants), etc. These *begars* were imposed upon the cultivators according to their castes. The cultivators of low castes such as Chamars, Regar, Bairwa, Dhanka, etc., had to perform more *begar* than cultivators of high castes.<sup>26</sup> Due to the imposition of *begar* the peasants could not do their own work timely and efficiently. The peasants grudgingly and under pressure performed these various types of *begars* and when they

could not bear the burden any more they protested and rose against this unjust and oppressive system of forced labour.

Maltreatment and social discrimination against cultivators by Jagirdars also added to the cause of peasant agitation in the State. There was a general complaint among the Jat cultivators against the Jagirdars for depriving them of many social privileges. They were not allowed to ride on horse and elephant.<sup>27</sup> Jat students could not get scholarship,<sup>28</sup> whereas scholarships were sanctioned to Rajput cultivators. Educated Jats were not given higher posts in the services of the State and Jagirs.<sup>29</sup> Caste discrimination was practised in giving employment in the lower services of the State and *thikanas* such as police, military, revenue, etc. Hence, the Jats openly demanded that "they may be allowed to enjoy the same social status and other privileges which are enjoyed by the Rajputs". If the Jats performed any social ceremony like the Rajputs they were maltreated by the Jagirdars. The Jagirdars also did not accord fair treatment to Jat cultivators in the matter of land revenue and its collection.<sup>30</sup> This social degradation of the Jats created unrest among them to an incalculable extent. Before tracing the history of the Jat cultivators' agitation in Shekhawati, it may be noted that the total population of the Jats in Jaipur State (according to the Census of 1931) was 3,13,609 (1,70,306 males and 1,34,303 females). The population of the whole State being 26,31,775, the Jats constituted 11.91% or approximately 1/8th of the total population. They easily headed the list in numerical strength and formed the principal agriculturist class in the State. They were predominant in the whole of the western division of the State, the largest numbers being in the *Nizamat* Shekhawati, *Thikana* Sikar, *Nizamat* Torawati and *Nizamat* Sambhar. Hence in the peasant movement of Shekhawati and in the whole of the State, in fact, the Jats were dominant. They did not tolerate any longer their exploitation by the Jagirdars.

*Thikanadars* and Jagirdars did not devote their attention to the welfare of the peasant masses. They did not spend anything on the education and medical care of the cultivators and if the cultivators started schools the *thikana* closed them down.<sup>31</sup> The average annual income of Sikar chiefship in 1925 was Rs. 5,50,000/- (land revenue Rs. 4,00,000 and other income

Rs. 150,000). But the annual expenditure on public welfare was only Rs 35,000 (public health 20,000 and education 15,000).<sup>32</sup>

During the famine period proper relief measures were not taken by these thikanedars and Jagirdars. The cultivators were feeling immediate necessity of agricultural reforms, extension of education, facilities for medical care and rural uplift, but their feudal rulers did not provide facilities for any of these, which created unrest among the former. In fact, the *Thakurs* thought that they were not for the masses, but masses were meant to serve them. The licentiousness of Jagirdars and their extravagance was responsible for their indifference to the welfare of the peasants. They squandered their time and energy on *Sura* (wine) and *Sundari* (women).

Atrocities on cultivators by Jagirdars were intolerable, which created hatred among the former against the latter. In the words of M.K. Gandhi, "But so far as their people are concerned, the princes have unlimited control over them. They can imprison them at will, and even put them to death".<sup>33</sup> The Jagirdars exercised considerable executive and judiciary powers in their Jagirs while the State could not exercise any control on them.<sup>34</sup> There was no well-defined law to provide justice to the cultivators. If cultivators were unable to pay the dues (revenue, *lag-bag*, *begar*, etc.), they were put into the *Kath* (stocks) to torture them.<sup>35</sup> Besides, the cultivators were hung from the trees, brutally beaten and tortured in various inhuman ways.<sup>36</sup> For instance the cultivators complained against the *Thikana* Sikar to the Jaipur State authorities that,<sup>37</sup>

"The *Thikana* is realising taxes at exorbitant rates by force, e.g. they hang us on the trees, beat us and do all sorts of tyranny. Having been tired of such a maltreatment we (about 400 cultivators) tried to run away from Sikar last night and are now here on deputation before you to represent our grievances. We request you to take very early steps to restore normal conditions in Sikar and thus save us from the hardship of having to desert our present homes. About 500 houses (sic) have already deserted their homes and gone towards the Bikaner and Jodhpur States"

These atrocities of Jagirdars were rightly pointed out by H.D. Malaviya :<sup>38</sup>

“The backwardness of the State is to be attributed mainly to the existence of the Jagirdari system and the rule of Native Princes, who cared only for their pleasure pursuits and never gave any attention whatsoever to the care and well-being of their subjects as a matter of fact an exact replica of the worst features of the middle ages continued in Rajasthan right upto the middle of the 20th century. And even now, the feudal Jagirdars, incensed at the abolition of their heartless and inhuman exploitation, did their worst to defeat the implementation of the abolition legislation and took recourse to the most lawless activities and, like the barbarians of the middle ages, even burnt and pillaged the villages....There have been, for example, cases when women have been burnt alive, when villages have been razed to the ground, when trigger-happy Jagirdars have freely used their guns to kill the *Kisans*”.

### **Peasants Agitations**

The seeds of the peasant movement had existed since long under the economic, social and political system prevalent in Jaipur State. The Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920 led by the Indian National Congress had created consciousness among the masses all over India for fighting against all forms of oppression by the State authorities. The first mass movement in the Shekhawati region of Jaipur State was launched by Chirawa Sewa Samiti in 1921.<sup>39</sup> This society was originally formed for social work and was rendering various services during the periods of famine and scarcity. The Chirawa Sewa Samiti in its early stage was the organ of the bourgeoisie for penetrating among the rural masses through social work during the hard days of their suffering. It may be recalled that the moneyed class had no political and civil rights in Jaipur State. To fight against the feudal oppression they started organising the rural masses through this society. The branches of this society existed in several parts of Shekhawati. The Darbar was not taking any interest in removing the grievances of the people and showed no inclination to redress their wrongs. The people were discontented and fell an easy prey to the inducements of the

*Sewa Samiti*. In the month of September 1921, the *Sewa Samiti* started a movement for wearing *Swadeshi* cloth and for boycotting foreign cloth, to close down the liquor shops and defy the *Darbar's* order.<sup>40</sup> Soon after the beginning of this movement, the Raja of Khetri arrested the volunteers of the *Sewa Samiti*. The matter did not rest there. The Raja of Khetri wished to strike terror into the public mind and bounded several leading persons of Chirawa town for not joining the *Samiti*. The arrested persons were treated most inhumanly. They were forced to walk thirty miles on foot from Chirawa to Khetri and whipped on the way. They were denied drinking water all along the way and not permitted to attend the call of nature.<sup>41</sup> The arrested persons were retained in the lock-up illegally without any charge or trial for a fortnight. They were released through the intervention and protest of the Marwari Traders' Association of Calcutta and Bombay.<sup>42</sup>

In fact, this movement was not an agrarian movement, though it had created consciousness among the peasant masses to fight against the atrocities and exploitation of the State and Jagirdars. The Jat agitation in 1921 took the real shape of a peasant movement after the agitation of *Chirawa Sewa Samiti*. The moneyed class had started extending financial assistance to the Jat movement in all respects since 1921.<sup>43</sup>

In 1923 signs of serious discontent among the Jat and other cultivators of the Sikar *thikana* appeared and hundreds of cultivators came to Jaipur on several occasions to represent their grievances to the *Darbar* and to the Resident.<sup>44</sup> They alleged that there was no authorised chain of measurement for cultivated land, nor proper land records were maintained, nor there was any fixed demand for land revenue which was being continually enhanced. They stated that in addition to the land revenue they were called upon to pay a large number of unauthorised taxes (*lag-bags*) and *begar* and were put in stocks (*Kathi*) and otherwise tortured if they expressed their inability to pay and were also forcibly evicted from their holdings.<sup>45</sup> The *Darbar* did not take a serious note of these grievances. It advised the cultivators to present their grievances to the Rao Raja of Sikar as the *Darbar* felt sure that they would be redressed by him. When, however, the complaints continued to reach the *Darbar*, R.I. Glancy (a British Officer) was sent to the Rao Raja, who promised to look

into the peasants' grievances and not to raise the rent. The Rao Raja also promised to pay the expenses incurred by the peasants on their journey from Sikar to Jaipur.<sup>46</sup> The cultivators, however, again marched to Jaipur after some time, complaining to the Darbar that the *thikana* had broken the agreement which was made with Glancy's approval.<sup>47</sup> Matters, however, did not improve and the agitation became widespread. In the meantime, Ram Narain Chaudhri, Editor of the *Tarun Rajasthan*, Ajmer, a political agitator, entered Sikar and worked among the poor and illiterate cultivators there in order to create a strong agitation similar to that which had taken place at Bijolia in Mewar.<sup>48</sup> He also brought the condition of these peasants to the notice of the people of England by establishing contacts with extremist politicians there who had been induced not only to publish articles in the *Daily Herald* but also raised the question about the condition of the cultivators of Sikar in the House of Commons in May 1925.<sup>49</sup> This uproar led the Secretary of State for India in London to inquire into the conditions of the peasants of Sikar and to advise the Rao Raja to carry out a survey and to effect a regular settlement. However, the Rao Raja did not act accordingly.<sup>50</sup> The year 1925 is an important year in the peasant movement in Shekhawati. In October 1925, the first meeting of the *Jat Sabha* was held in Bagar (Shekhawati).<sup>51</sup> In this meeting they concluded that their depressed social condition was due to their deplorable economic condition and they in this meeting resolved to chalk out a programme to fight against their social and economic exploitation by the State and Jagirdars.

Later in December 1925, a movement arose in the *thikanas* of Khetri, Mandawa, Dundlod, Bisau and Nawalgarh. This movement was launched by the Shekhawati *Jat Sabha*. The cultivators had derived encouragement from the Jat meeting at Pushkar in 1925. The Jat leaders started moving about in the villages of Shekhawati and openly preached disobedience and non-payment of rents to the *thikanas*.<sup>52</sup> First of all, the Jat cultivators belonging to the *thikana* Mandawa approached the *Nazim* of Jhunjhunu and complained that despite the current bad year the Thakur was pressing them hard to pay more rent for the land under their cultivation. In the meantime the Jat cultivators of the whole of



the Shekhawati area united and adopted a firm attitude against the *Thakurs* and decided for the non-payment of rents to the *thikanas*.<sup>53</sup>

The agitations which started in 1925 in Sikar and other *thikanas* of Shekhawati continued to gain strength. The State and *thikanadars* were not sympathetic to the demands of cultivators and started suppressing the movement cruelly through their local agents and police force. Further, they started humiliating the Jat cultivators socially. These repressive measures could not suppress the movement because the peasants were determined to fight against the age-old exploitative policy of the feudal lords. Without achieving reforms in the prevalent economic system, the withdrawal of movement was quite impossible.

On the occasion of the festival of *Basant Panchami* in 1932 a splendid function of Jat Mahasabha was held in Jhunjhunu.<sup>54</sup> This function was attended by 60 thousand men and encouraged the Jat cultivators to carry their movement further. To infuse a sense of unity among them in a meeting at Palthana in September 1933 the Jat cultivators resolved to hold a *Mahayagya* in Sikar. With this object they opened an office at Sikar and proceeded to make preparations without obtaining the permission of the *thikana*.<sup>55</sup> It was only after great persuasion by the *thikana* authorities that they obtained permission to organise this ceremony.

The Jats also applied to the Rao Raja for the loan of an elephant for taking their President in procession but he refused to accede to this request.<sup>56</sup> This insult of the Jats further embittered their relations with the *thikana*. The speeches delivered at the *Mahayagya* and its allied functions under the cloak of social reform created class hatred and sharpened the peasant movement. To put a stop to this movement the *thikana* served a notice to Chandrabhan, the Jat Sabha's Secretary under section 144 C. P. C. to leave the Sikar territory within 16 hours. Chandrabhan disobeyed the order and was arrested and prosecuted under Section 177 J. P. C. and convicted by the Faujdar to 6 weeks simple imprisonment with a fine of Rs. 51/-.<sup>57</sup>

The Jats vehemently protested against this high handedness of the Rao Raja of Sikar and as an expression of their resentment announced the no-rent campaign. In February 1934 they

came to Jaipur in hundreds and presented the following Charter of their demands to the Darbar :<sup>58</sup>

1. That land rent may be fixed permanently according to the quality of land and climate, etc.
2. That in cases of extreme depression or adverse fluctuation of market-rates of commodities or decrease in produce due to climatic reasons or droughts, fixed rent too in proportion of loss to crop or its face value may be ordained to be remitted.
3. That levy of all other cesses except land rent may be declared illegal.
4. That *begar* (forced labour), which is recognised all over civilised world as a relic of barbarous age, may totally be abolished in all its existing forms.
5. That punishment of fixing in stocks (*kathi*) also stands today condemned in the eyes of civilised nations, and hence should be abolished.
6. That Village *Panchayat* may be empowered to decide petty cases of their villages themselves.
7. A fixed proportion of the total income of the *thikana*, say, one-eight part, to be ear-marked as a rule to be spent on education of peasants through their *Panchayats*.
8. The levying of octroi duty in every *thikana* besides that levied by the State, should be abolished.
9. All the orders and usages prejudicial to the interest and quality of social status of Jats with other communities should be quashed.
10. Jats may be allowed to enjoy the same social status and other privileges which are enjoyed by Rajputs.
11. Jats may be given preference and encouragement in the services of the *thikana*.
12. That if executive powers are to remain with the *thikana*, then the judiciary powers must be under the direct control of the State, as vesting of both these functions in the hands of one man is today held against the very principle of justice and logic all over the world and also it has proved to be an evil practice in our *thikana*.

13. That if due to any reasons the above demand may be deemed difficult to be acceded to, then the *thikana* may be made to administer its affairs with consent of a newly constituted and elected *Panchayat* in which all the communities inhabiting Sikar *Thikana* will be represented in proportion to their numerical strength.
14. Master Chandra Bhan Singh (Secretary of Jat Mahasabha) may be released unconditionally.

The Vice-President of the Jaipur State Council assured the Jat delegation that their grievances would be looked into. This made the Rao Raja discuss the Jat memorandum. As a result of this as well as the enquiries made by Capt. A. W. T. Webb, Senior Officer, Sikar Estate, the following notification was issued in August 1934 announcing the reforms sanctioned by the Rao Raja of Sikar with a view to improving the administration of the *thikana* and to ameliorating the condition of its subject :<sup>59</sup>

1. Abolition of *Lags*—All *lags* abolished and *Dhuan Bach* on cultivators.
2. Application of Jaipur Tenure Rules to Sikar *Khalsa* land—Rules applied to Sikar.
3. Hindi—All correspondence between the administration and the public will be conducted in Hindi.
4. Internal customs—No customs will be charged in future on goods going from one village to another.
5. *Lagan*—After St. (Samvat) 1991 (1934 A. D.) *Lagan* shall be fixed for a period and at rates to be decided in consultation with the Sikar Jat *Panchayat*. Classification of lands will be made as soon as possible.
6. The Sikar Jat *Panchayat* is requested to form a body of 2 or 3 cultivators from each Tehsil who can act as an advisory body to the senior officer in matters connected with cultivators interest.
7. *Begar* (forced labour)—All *begar* is abolished.
8. Education—It is to be clearly understood that all schools, scholarship maintained or aided by the Sikar administration are open to all castes without distinction of caste or creed.

9. *Gauchara* (pasture) Lands—*Gauchara* lands are common to all and free access to these lands must be kept open for all who have a right to use them.
10. Rights of cultivators in alienated lands—As it is most undesirable that different rates of *lagan* exist in Sikar, it is hereby notified that for the future Jagirdars, *Badhdars* and others shall not levy more in the aggregate from (sic) their cultivators than is levied by the Sikar administration from their cultivators. Differences of opinion between Jagirdars, *Badhdars*, etc., and other cultivators shall be decided by the Revenue Court.  
The use of illegal means of collecting *lagan*, whether by owners of alienated lands or Sikar officials will, if reported and proved, be punished with the greatest severity, and in the case of alienated lands render them liable to *zapti* or confiscation.
11. *Nazars* (gift)—This is absolutely forbidden.
12. Medical—Medical facilities for villages will be introduced at a very early date.

The Jats at first refused to accept these reforms and it was only with great persuasion and after making further revenue concessions that Captain Webb managed their acceptance.

After this announcement, the revenue demand was fixed and notices were issued to cultivators for payment of the rents due. The Jats refused payment and assembled in large numbers and defied the officials sent to collect the rent. A detachment of 30 Jaipur Armed Police was thereupon sent in February 1935 to assist the Sikar officials. The main centre of this no-rent campaign was a village in Sangraovat Tehsil, 14 miles from Sikar. With the help of the Jaipur Armed Police this movement was crushed by the Sikar authorities.<sup>60</sup>

As the revenue concessions granted by the Sikar authorities were applicable only to Sikar *Khalsa* territory the Jats now diverted their attention to the Rajput *Bhomias* and other small Jagirdars with the idea of compelling them to grant similar concessions and it was only by the intervention of the Sikar Police that serious clashes between the *Bhomias* and the Jats in villages Singhasan

and Puri-Badi were averted. The Rajput landlords started suppressing the peasants through all possible means.

At Khuri, a village inhabited partly by Jats and partly by Rajputs, a Jat marriage party took out its procession on 22 March, 1935 through the Rajput portion of village with the bridegroom riding a horse. The Rajputs took strong exception to this action as being provocative and contrary to custom. Large numbers of Jats and Rajputs collected and a clash occurred in which a Jat lost his life.<sup>61</sup> Senior officer reached Khuri with police to control the situation and ordered the police to *lathicharge* upon the Jats. As a result four persons lost their lives and hundred were injured.<sup>62</sup> This incident further strained Rajput-Jat relations and worsened the situation. After this incident the peasants started a definite no-rent campaign and the Jats of 15 villages in *thikana* Sikar took an oath to outcaste any Jat who paid revenue to the *thikana* and to boycott socially the Rajputs as well as persons of other communities who sided with them.<sup>63</sup>

In April 1935, the Jat peasants attacked the Revenue officials of *thikana* Sikar, who were sent to village Kudan with police force to collect land revenues.<sup>64</sup> The police opened fire on the Jat cultivators as a result of which 4 Jat peasants were killed, 14 injured and about 175 were arrested. The authorities took all the repressive measures to crush the movement. The local Jat *Panchayat* was declared unlawful. The President and Secretary of the Rajputana *Jat Sabha* and two workers of the *Jat Mahasabha* were externed.

All the schools started by the Siksha Mandal of Shekhawati or by Jats themselves, were closed compulsorily. The masters incharge of these schools were in many cases arrested. The school building at Palthana was razed to the ground. Arrears of land revenue amounting in some cases 3 to 5 thousand rupees were realized from a single individual or selected individuals. In addition to these arrears, fines were imposed for default and realized by force. It is interesting to note that arrears due from even *jon-Jats* were realized from Jats alone. Their property was seized and sold for 25 or 30 per cent of its real value.

After arrears had been realized, the floors of houses were dug-up in 3 villages to recover hidden cash and ornaments. No

formalities usually attendant upon a process of attachment or sale were observed anywhere. A good deal of movable property was reported to have been looted and 4 villages became deserted as their inhabitants left their homes in fear of harassment. As a result of this the Jat peasants in very affluent circumstances were turned into paupers and several Jats of leading positions began to spend their days in exile out of fear of oppression at the hands of Sikar officials.<sup>65</sup>

The defiance of the Jat peasants of village Kudan compelled Sikar *thikana* to start a regular survey and settlement of land and to accept some of the peasants' demands. To ensure the success of these steps and improve the administration of Sikar *thikana*, the Rao Raja agreed to invest Captain Webb, Senior Officer, Sikar with special powers in the administration of the *thikana*.<sup>66</sup> The Jat peasants were not fully satisfied with these measures and they started reorganizing the peasants against the *thikana*.

Meanwhile, the beginning of the peasant movement in other parts of Shekhawati strengthened the movement at Sikar. It widened the area of the peasant movement. In 1934, a movement was started by the Jat Kisan *Panchayat* in the *thikanas* of Shekhawati, viz., Khetri, Dundlod, Nawalgarh, Mandawa, Biaso, Surajgarh, Herwas, Ismailpur, Jakhara, Mandrela, Malsisar, Khandela, Alsisar, Patan, etc. In March 1934, they launched a no-rent campaign in these *thikanas*. With the launching of this movement the Jagirdars started attacking the peasants through their hirelings. It was on the evening of 16th May 1934 when almost all the men-folk of the village Hanumanpura had gone out to attend various marriage parties, Thakur Kalyan Singh of *thikana* Herwa with his men came to the village on camels and first set fire to the courtyard of Chowdhari Govind Ram jat. The fire spread with speed and burnt to ashes 33 houses before it could be extinguished. It caused a loss of property of several thousand rupees, injured several children, burnt to death two cows and scorched four green trees. In addition, valuable papers, *pattas*, receipts and certified copies and documentary evidence of land rights were burnt.<sup>67</sup> Similarly the *thikanadar* of Dundlod intimidated the peasants of the Jaisinghpura village. On 21st June 1934, Ishwar Singh, brother of Thakur Harnath Singh

of Dundlod along with his men attacked the cultivators of Jaisinghpura armed with lathis, sharp weapons and guns while they were walking in their fields. In this incident four persons were killed and 23 were badly injured. Such a policy of brutal intimidation and terror resorted to by the *thikanadars* of Shekhawati led the cultivators to unite and protest against the *thikanas*.<sup>68</sup>

The *Shekhawati Jat Kisan Panchayat* presented a memorandum to the Vice-President of the Council of the State on 9th October, 1934 mentioning their following specific grievances against the *thikanas* :<sup>69</sup>

1. The *thikanas* eject cultivators on the slightest excuse.
2. The *thikanas* have been continually enhancing rents with the result that rents have increased by nearly 100 per cent or more during the past 20 years
3. The unit of measurement has been gradually diminishing and now it is a cotton rope of about  $82\frac{1}{2}$  ft. as compared with the State iron chain of 165 ft.
4. Although the State has abolished *begar* (forced labour), it is still exacted by the *thikanas* in one form or the other.
5. In addition to rent the cultivators have to pay a very large number of cesses (*lag-bag*) including cesses to meet the expense of the landlords marriage, guests, tours, pleasure trips, shooting excursion, etc.
6. No remission at all is given and whatever the condition of the crop, or of the tenant, he has to discharge this liability in full.
7. If they are unable to pay, they are put into the *Kath* (stocks), although these have been abolished in the State and subjected to all sorts of torture.
8. *Zakat*, or customs duty, is levied on all imports including those exempted under the Customs Tariff of the State.
9. Receipts for payment of land revenue etc. are not issued.
10. The Panchpana *thikanas* are exempt from court fees, and their private Vakils conduct cases against cultivators.
11. *Mohrana* (Registration fee) is now charged from cultivators also instead of being confined to *Mahajans*, etc.

12. One or two favourites of the *thikanas* enjoy the possession of pastures while the cultivator has no place in which to graze his cattle, he can not even use the leaves of the trees growing on his holding, without paying for them.
13. The landlords (Jagirdars) do not spend anything on the education or medical relief of the tenants and if cultivators start schools, they are closed down by the *thikanas*.

The Vice-President did not receive the deputation sympathetically. He informed the Jat delegation that the *Darbar* would depute a Revenue Officer to enquire into the matter. Meanwhile, the peasants were warned to refrain from holding meetings and were instructed that they must on no account refuse to pay the ordinary demands of revenue, etc., asked by their landlords.<sup>70</sup> The cultivators returned depressed and with a feeling of anger against the State. They consequently, started refusing to pay any dues to the *Jagirdars*. On the demand of Jaipur State the *Nazim* of Shekhawati submitted a report on the general situation of Shekhawati after making a tour of the area. The *Nazim* enumerated in detail the grievances of the cultivators, which were similar to those mentioned in their memorial to the *Darbar*. He suggested that the *thikanas* should be ordered to fix rents in accordance with the produce and the market rates. As regards the cultivators, he suggested that the Jat leaders should be asked to use their influence in persuading the tenants to pay the ordinary revenue demand.<sup>71</sup> But the State failed to make any settlement between the tenants landlords.

In the year 1936, the peasants started depositing their revenue dues in the *Nizamat* because there were differences between the cultivators and the *thikanedars*.<sup>72</sup> In the same year, the work of survey and settlement started, which normalised the situation in the area.

In 1938, the Jaipur *Rajya Praja Mandal* movement was reorganised and its first conference was held at Jaipur. This weakened the peasant movement in Shekhawati (Sikar and other *thikanas*) as many of the prominent leaders of the *Kisan* movement joined the *Praja Mandal*. Of Course, the *Praja Mandal* was also demanding the redressal of the grievances of cultivators, but its



main demand was to form a responsible government in the State. The inclusion of the demand of the cultivators was aimed more at involving the rural masses in *Praja Mandal* than securing them real relief.

The *Shekhawati Jat Kisan Panchayat* did not merge in the *Praja Mandal* and retained its separate identity till 1949. After 1938 the *Shekhawati Jat Kisan Panchayat* voiced the grievances of cultivators through leaflets, memorandums and its paper *Panchayat Patrika*. But no militant mass movements as were launched previously could be started after 1938. The cultivators were also convinced that their grievances could not be removed until the responsible government was formed in the State.

In 1939, in the *Nizamats* of Hindaun and Torawati some minor peasant movements arose in the Khalsa area under the leadership of *Praja Mandal* activists. Their main demand was remission of land revenue due to the occurrence of famine.<sup>73</sup> These movements did not last long because their leaders were not from the peasant communities, but were mainly from the urban areas.

Bairwa (Chamar) uprising in *thikana* Uniara was also a result of caste discrimination. Generally, this low caste was a class of agricultural labourers. In *thikana* Uniara land was not rented out to them and if somehow they managed to obtain land they were ejected by the Rao Raja.<sup>74</sup> They were not allowed to wear silver and gold ornaments, nor good fine clothes, and were forced to give *begar*. They were also not allowed to live in *pacca* houses.<sup>75</sup>

In 1946, a movement of Bairwa cultivators was launched by All India State People Bairwa *Mahasabha* in the Uniara *thikana* of Jaipur State. In December 1946 Bairwa cultivators were ejected by Rao Raja of Uniara from their holdings and compelled to carry the dead animals.<sup>76</sup> All India State People Bairwa *Mahasabha's* representatives saw the Prime Minister of Jaipur State to represent the grievances of their community. Their demands were to stop the *thikana's* atrocities upon their community and to secure their rights in land cultivated by them. But nothing was done by the State to meet the demands of the Bairwas who continued their movement till 1949.

The peasant agitations in Jaipur State were the outcome of the prevalent economic system which condemned peasants to a life full of suffering and drudgery. These agitations took place mainly in the Jagir (non-*Khalsa*) areas where no definite rules existed for tilling the land by peasants. In the region of Shekhawati (Sikar and other petty *thikanas*) a peasant movement which arose in 1921 continued till 1949. During this period peasants were harassed by the Jagirdars through their hirelings, caste brethren and the police. However, as a result of these movements the peasants had partly gained their social and economic rights by 1949. The *Praja Mandal* movement which was reorganised in 1938 weakened the peasant movement as the prominent leaders of the *Kisan* movement associated themselves with *Praja Mandal* movement. Some minor peasant movements which arose in Jaipur State under the leadership of *Praja Mandal* in 1939 were not of much importance and ended in a short time. This important movement which was launched by the All India State People's *Bairwa Mahasabha* in 1946 continued till 1949. All these movements had created consciousness among the rural masses about their rights and grievances and to some extent helped in ameliorating their socio-economic conditions.

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## PEASANT MOVEMENT IN JODHPUR STATE

The State of Jodhpur was the biggest State of Rajasthan covering an area about 26% of the province. Here the land was mainly held by the Jagirdars, as 87% part of the Jodhpur State was under them. Only 13% part was under the direct management of the State in which some rules of land revenue administration existed. The position of peasants in the Jagir area was tenant at will. The peasants were exploited and oppressed at the hands of Jagirdars and there was no remedy to get justice as most of the Jagirdars were empowered with judiciary powers. The peasantry of Jodhpur arose against the feudal exploitation in 1922 under the influence of various international, national and local events. The conditions of the peasants were deplorable and they were not finding any way out to get their conditions improved. They were carrying the burden as an irony of fate. The peasants were the victims of three-fold exploitation i.e. the British, the Maharaja and the Jagirdars. When the peasants of Jodhpur awakened in the wake of national upheaval they became very much conscious about their rights and they presented a number of grievances before the authorities. Their grievances were similar to other states such as the heavy land revenue, insecurity of land tenures, large number of cesses, cattle tax, begar etc.

The history of mass awakening in Jodhpur State began from 1915 when the first political society known as *Marudhar Mitra Hitkarini Sabha* was established. This society aimed at looking after the social and economic interests of the people of Marwar. The activities of this society remained confined to Jodhpur city and its influence was also limited. The second political organisation known as *Marwar Seva Sangh* came into being in 1921 which

was a broad based organisation. It was influenced by the *Rajasthan Seva Sangh*, which was established in 1920 by Vijay Singh Pathik. *Marwar Seva Sangh* aimed at protesting against the misrule, corrupt bureaucracy, lawlessness, and creating awakening among the people of all sections of Marwar. During this period the peasant movement at Bijolia was in progress and all the neighbouring States of Rajasthan became alert to check such type of activities. The fear of non-co-operation was also obvious and the *Marwar Seva Sangh* was considered the offshoot of the Indian National Congress. The newly formed organisation put the Jodhpur Police on alert. The Inspector General of Police of the State recommended to crush the activities of this organisation and institute a case against its leader Jai Narain Vyas under the Sedition Act.<sup>1</sup> All those measures of the State Police put this organisation to a premature end. This organisation could not enlist much members, as it was also confined to the city. But these early activities awakened the masses to some extent and created political awareness. These activities were in the hands of enlightened urban middle class leaders. The leaders also felt that without a broad social base they could not achieve their goal. The leadership has not disheartened with the failure and its efforts for a broad-based mass organisation continued.

In 1922 a new chapter of mass movements opened with the tribal movement. The tribe men of Marwar (Jodhpur) joined the *Eki* movement launched by Moti Lal Tejawat. Alongwith the social reform activities the Bhils and Garassias of Bali and Godwar districts of Jodhpur State refused to pay land revenue and other taxes during the year 1922.<sup>2</sup> Jodhpur State posted military forces in the disturbed areas to suppress the movement. This brought the situation under control. The Bhils and Garassias became aloof from the *Eki* and agreed to pay the usual taxes. The *Panchas* of tribes signed an *Iqrarnama* to this effect.<sup>3</sup>

The above movement got a special significance as for the first time a exploited section of society came into direct confrontation with the State authorities. This also induced the idea of protest among the down trodden peasantry of Jodhpur State. In the history of protest against feudalism the tribal movement of Jodhpur State may be considered a pioneer movement.

The phase of 1920-22 created suitable political conditions to advance the cause of exploited people. Jai Narain Vyas a leading politician of Jodhpur State continued his efforts to build up a powerful mass movement. The activities and growth of *Marwar Seva Sangh* were hampered by the State through mounting police and legal pressures upon its leaders and workers. The said organisation did not make much headway. This organisation became defunct when a political organisation known as *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* came into being in its wake in 1923. In fact the *Marwar Seva Sangh* was converted into the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* as various restrictions were imposed by the State on the *Sangh*.<sup>4</sup>

### Movements Under the Marwar Hitkarni Sabha

The aims and objects of the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* were political. It was a firm belief of its leaders that they could achieve their political goal only through mass movements. It was a difficult task to organise political work in a state where the press was gagged and sedition Acts were in existence. But the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* soon got the opportunity of political work with its birth as an agitating public issue arose in 1923.

The council of State, Jodhpur, passed an order on 29th October, 1923 to permit the export of live-stocks to raise the State revenue.<sup>5</sup> The said order was resented by the people of Marwar on social, religious and economic grounds. As a result of the order, thousands of animals were transported to the contonments of Ajmer, Nasirabad, Palanpur, etc. and to the butchereries of Bombay and Ahmedabad.<sup>6</sup> This information agitated the people on religious grounds as the cows were also exported in large numbers. The effects of this policy were far reaching on the economy. In Jodhpur State Cattle breeding was equally important to agricultural operations. In the desert region the peasants mainly depended on cattle breeding. The export of animal, mainly of female-cattle, caused depletion of cattle wealth for a long period and the situation deteriorated to the extent of a virtual collapse of rural economy. The *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* decided to fight this public issue to channelise the mass discontentment into political channels.

The effects of cattle export policy were expected to be multi-dimensional. The money-lenders and Jagirdars used to take



away the livestock in lieu of debt and revenue from the peasants in cases of non-payments. The livestock seized by the money-lenders and Jagirdars were either sold in the local area or given back to the peasants on share breeding. The prohibition on export of livestock restricted them to some extent but the export policy made it easy to seize the livestock in large number. The effects of this export policy and view of the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* are well explained by Sobhag Mathur as follows :

“At that time, in the adjoining States like Udaipur, Jaipur, Bikaner, export of she-goats and sheep was prohibited; and the leader of the *Hitkarni Sabha*, Jainarain Vyas in his representation to His Highness not only brought this to his notice but stated that such an export would result in reduction of number of goats and sheep which formed sometimes the only wealth of the rural masses and was their permanent source of income in Marwar. It would also cause scarcity of wool, ghee and manure. He quoted in his representation Lord Chelmsford in whose report it was mentioned that the State of Marwar should pay more attention to the breeding of goats and sheep as it was vital for the economy of the State and for the prosperity of its people.”<sup>7</sup>

The cattle export policy became an important public issue and the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* launched a campaign against it by forming a committee.<sup>8</sup>

Jai Narain Vyas presented the representation before the Maharaja to get the cattle export policy cancelled. The demand was very much reasonable but it was turned down by the State as collective and organised efforts were not acceptable and tolerable. The *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* accelerated its efforts and to win over the public support a large number of leaflets were distributed. A public meeting was held on 15th July 1924 at Jodhpur to mount pressure upon the State authorities.<sup>9</sup> The meeting proved very successful as it gained wide mass support and triggered off a series of public meetings. Through these public meetings the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* and the issue of cattle export were gaining wide popularity and public meetings became an appropriate way of

protest. In order to create terror in the public a large number of the police force was ordered to be present in public meetings. Important workers and leaders were summoned to the police station without written orders and without any charge. The leaders were ill-treated. The sole purpose in treating the public representatives with contempt was to cause frustration in them so that they might get disheartened and drop their demands. But the repressive measures only made the movement more popular and day by day the movement's social base was widening. Looking to the growing public pressure the State accepted the demand on 15th August, 1924.<sup>10</sup>

With this success the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* became very much popular in Jodhpur State. The previous organisation viz. the *Marudhar Mitra Hitkarni Sabha* and the *Marwar Sewa Sangh* were confined to the city of Jodhpur and their social base was limited to the newly emerged middle class which was negligible in number. But the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* widened its base in the rural areas and the down-tradden peasants became its members. The peasant movements of the other states were spontaneous and it was in due course of time that they acquired an organised political character, while in the State of Jodhpur the peasant movement was the result of conscious efforts of political organisations. 'This movement gave an insight to the peasants and inspired them to fight for social and economic freedom from feudal and colonial cultures. This also induced self-confidence and courage among the peasants.'<sup>7</sup>

The State authorities were not reconciled to the growing popularity of the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* and they decided to quash it through various measures. In consequence a new organisation known as the *Raj Bhakta Desh Hitkarni Sabha* came into being with the support of State authorities to counteract the activities of *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha*. The new society was established in November, 1924.<sup>11</sup> This organisation had no social and economic programme and its sole object was to support the Maharaja and oppose the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha*. The *Raj Bhakta Desh Hitkarni Sabha* blindly supported the State and denounced the leadership of the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* with false charges of collecting money from the public and misusing it. The new organisation could not

gain mass support as it became clear very soon to the public that the founders of the new organisation were opportunists who had joined hands with the State for their personal ends. The image of the Marwar Hitkarni Sabha was established as the only mass organisation and the government efforts to counter it failed. ✓

On 19th March 1925, the Jodhpur State Council ordered the exile of most of the prominent leaders of the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* on the ground that their presence was inimical to the public interest. Some of the leaders were put under police watch and they were ordered to record their presence at the police station daily.<sup>12</sup> The organisation was not much powerful as it was obly in a growing stage and the leaders were not in favour of confrontation with the government. To avoid confrontation, these orders were not opposed by the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha*. The orders were considered as attack and the leaders decided to widen their base and make the organisation strong enough to accept the challenges in future.

The main leader Jai Narain Vyas was not exiled but he was put under police watch. His activities were completely checked and he preferred to go into voluntary exile and left Jodhpur. He resided mostly in Bawar and Ajmer and from there he enlightened the people of Marwar. There he associated himself with the activities of *Rajasthan Seva Sangh* and accepted the editorship of a weekly *Tarun Rajasthan* published by the *Sangh*. The absence of the prominent leaders did not dishearten the second rank leaders of the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* and they remained active. They spoke against the price rise of food-grains and other essential commodities. In October 1928 a deputation of the *Sabha* met the President of the Jodhpur State council and requested for a ban on export of the cereals. Its efforts succeeded and a ban was imposed on the export of cereals.<sup>13</sup> Jai Narain Vyas continued his campaign writing under the column "*Present Day Marwar*" in the *Young Rajasthan*.

All the above efforts not only succeeded in keeping the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* and its movement alive but also in widening its social base. In the beginning of 1929 the *Sabha* became much active and planned to launch a movement of agriculturists as it was the only potential section of society which could be

shaped into a political force in Jodhpur State. Jai Narain Vyas through his writings brought the miserable conditions of the peasants of Jodhpur State to public notice.<sup>14</sup> At a meetings of the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* on 12th May, 1929 a committee consisting of nine persons was formed with the object of awakening the rural masses against forced labour, high rate of land revenue, various cesses, and other grievances.<sup>15</sup> Jai Narain Vyas appealed to the peasants to start a non-violent movement against the Jagirdars and not to pay any revenue or tax and lags to the Jagirdars as a protest against their atrocities.<sup>16</sup> This was the formal call to begin the agitation in the Jagir areas of Jodhpur State. It was the considered view of the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* that the peasants of the Jagir area were, in comparison to the *Khalsa*, living in more deplorable conditions. Thus, the *Sabha* concentrated on the cause of peasants of the Jagir areas. To attract the public attention towards the conditions of peasants the *Sabha* published two booklets entitled "*Papa-Bai-ki-Pol*" and "*Marwar-ki-Awastha*".

All these activities alerted the State authorities and some precautionary measures were adopted to check them. The *Sabha* stirred the peasants in the Jagirs of Raipur, Bagri and Balunda. The peasants of these Jagirs followed the call and refused to recognise the authority of the Jagirdars. The movement was very slow in picking up due to various reasons. The *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* was not an organisation of peasants. There was discontentment among the peasants but there was no initiation from the peasants to struggle. In Jodhpur State there were many geographical, environmental, communication, cultural, social and economic diversities which did not allow smooth organisation of the peasants. The leaders of the *Sabha* were mostly urban elements and it was in some ways a handicap. Not only this but the leaders were from the upper castes of the Hindu hierarchy and their intercourse with the peasant caste was not easy. Despite all these shortcomings the state authorities considered this a powerful movement. The Inspector General of Police, Jodhpur reported to Government that the activities of Jai Narain Vyas, Anand Raj Surana and Bhanwarlal Sarraf were a sort of Bolshevistic movement and it needed serious measures on the part of the government.<sup>17</sup>

The *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* decided to hold the first session of the Marwar State's people conference on 11th and 12th October, 1929 at Jodhpur. To encourage the rural community to attend the conference in large numbers its delegates were allowed to attend the session free.<sup>18</sup> All the arrangements were made for this conference but all of a sudden the government disallowed the conference.<sup>19</sup> The government orders were resented by the *Sabha*. Anticipating that the situation might worsen, the State decided to arrest Jai Narain Vyas, Anand Raj Surana and Bhanwarlal Sarraf. On 23rd September, 1929 the above leaders were arrested and were tried by the special court. On 20th January, 1930 the said court gave its judgement in which Jai Narain Vyas was sentenced to five years rigorous imprisonment and fined Rs. 1,000/- or in default to undergo one year of rigorous imprisonment. Bhanwar Lal Sarraf and Anand Raj Surana were sentenced to four years rigorous imprisonment and fined Rs. 1,000/- each or to undergo one year rigorous imprisonment in default.<sup>20</sup> In March, 1931 the political detainees were released in British India. Jodhpur State also released the leaders on 9th March, 1931 in accordance with the Gandhi-Irwin pact.

The peasant movement launched in some Jagirs under the leadership of the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* in 1929 could not advance much. The activities of the *Sabha* remained checked for one year when its leaders were put in Jail.

### **Spontaneous Peasant Movement**

The political activities launched by various organisations opened the way for protest against the defective State policies and injustice. The world wide economic depression of 1930 affected the poor peasant masses much more. In Jodhpur State draught conditions prevailed in the year 1930-31, which made the peasants miserable. The peasants of the Khalsa villages were unable to pay cash rents. The Mali cultivators held a general meeting at China-Ka-Baria (a place near Mandore) on 8th July, 1931 in which they decided to represent before the government to request for 50% remission in cash rents. In fact the cash rent system which was known as *bigori* system was introduced in 1928 after a new settlement of the Khalsa land in 1921-26.<sup>21</sup> The rates fixed under this were definitely higher than the rates charged under *Latai* system.

The peasants submitted a number of petitions to the revenue authorities between 14th to 18th July, 1931, but no heed was paid to their request.<sup>22</sup> Thereupon, the peasants in their several meetings held in different villages decided to outcaste those who would pay the land revenue to the State.<sup>23</sup> These activities were confined around Mandore among Mali cultivators. The State took early steps as the peasants had already threatened a no-rent campaign. The State ordered a total remission of Rs. 2,597/- in rent for the villages of Mandore, Began and Chainpura.<sup>24</sup> This decision did not satisfy the peasants as their demand was for reduction in amount under *bigori* system. Due to limited strength the above movement could not continue. The remission given by the State proved the success of this movement. The issue of *begori* system and this movement attracted the political workers and peasants of the Jodhpur State to some extent.

### The Marwar State People's Conference 1931

The holding of the Marwar State People's Conference marked a new phase of the peasant movement. The first session of the Marwar State People's Conference was held at Pushkar (Ajmer) on 24th and 25th November, 1931 under the Presidentship of Chand Karan Sharda.<sup>25</sup> The said session was to be held in October 1929 at Jodhpur, but it was banned by the State. Again there were the possibilities of various obstacles in the way from the State and to avoid it Pushkar was considered an appropriate place.

Chand Karan Sharda in his Presidential address requested of Maharaja of Jodhpur to abolish *begar*, *lag-bag* and ban on papers. He also asked for administrative reforms.<sup>26</sup> The following resolutions relating to the peasantry were passed.<sup>27</sup>

1. The practice of *begar* should be stopped at once.
2. A Committee should be formed to look after the welfare of the peasantry.
3. All the Jagirdars should be deprived of their judicial powers.
4. *Panchayats* should be established in villages.

5. The increased land-revenue under *bigori* system should be reduced without delay.
6. Peasants should be given occupancy rights.

The above resolutions passed by the Marwar State People's Conference were owned by the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha*. In the first week of December, 1931 a large number of peasants assembled at Jodhpur under the leadership of the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha*. The peasants from different districts submitted their petitions to the revenue authorities of the State under the guidance of the *Sabha*.<sup>28</sup> In this campaign peasants participation was encouraging and the peasants remained in the fore-front. In 1931 a new organisation known as the Marwar Youth League came into being and it also participated in this campaign of peasants. The peasants again submitted various petitions to the State authorities between 9th February to 2nd March, 1932 and requested them to abolish *Lag-bags* and to reduce the land revenue under *bigori* system.<sup>29</sup> To check the growth of this agrarian struggle the government declared the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* and the Marwar Youth League unlawful organisations on 5th March, 1932.<sup>30</sup>

The ban on the above organisations dealt a severe blow to the agrarian struggle launched under the influence of the Pushkar Conference. The movement built-up by the *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* got a severe set-back.

### **Movement Under the Leadership of Marwar Lok Parishad**

After 1932 the peasant movement in Jodhpur remained checked for a long time. Between 1932-34 there were some scattered agitations in the areas of Nagaur Pargana. The agitations of the above period were not significant as they could not succeed in making the cause advance. In fact for two years the political activities in Jodhpur came to a halt due to the repressive policy of the State. In the year 1934 the *Jodhpur Praja Mandal* and in 1936 the Civil Liberties Union came into being. The activities of both these organisations were limited to the Urban area. These were also declared unlawful by the State in 1937. In May, 1938 a new organisation known as the *Marwar Lok Parishad* was established. The formation of this organisation took place under favourable national political situation.

The activities in the princely states had attracted the attention of the national leaders and the Indian National Congress. The most formidable and oppressive stronghold of feudalism lay in the princely states and it was challenged in 1934 in the Shekhawati Region of Jaipur State by peasant outbreaks. Such type of outbreaks took place in Ajmer, Alwar, Kashmir, Loharu etc. The Congress still was following the policy of non-interference in the affairs of the princely states. The All-India States People's conference had been a very moderate body, confined to drawing up petitions and issuing pamphlets. In 1936 Jawahar Lal Nehru addressed the fifth session of the All India States People's Conference which marked the beginning of a change. Nehru urged the need for mass contacts in place of mere petitions, and the session for the first time drew up a programme of agrarian demands : a one third cut in land revenue, scaling down of debts, and an enquiry into peasant grievances in the context of the tragedies of Kashmir, Alwar, Sikar and Loharu.<sup>31</sup> A significant advance was made by the mass movements between 1937-1939. In February 1938 the Indian National Congress in Haripura session decided to support the movements of princely states. The establishment of the *Marwar Lok Parishad* got inspiration and encouragement from the above political developments.

During the year 1938-39 there was a famine in Jodhpur State and the peasants were much affected by it. The *Marwar Lok Parishad* worked a lot for the famine stricken peasants and became popular among them right from its inception. Jainarain Vyas, the inspiring genius behind the political awakening in Jodhpur State, was in exile. The working committee of the Parishad demanded the government for withdrawal of the exile order on their leader Jai Narain Vyas. In February, 1939 the government allowed the entry of Vyas<sup>32</sup> and the *Parishad* became much active. Between July-August, 1939 Parishad passed 28 resolutions related to civil rights, amendment of Press Act of 1923, compulsory education etc. The largest number of resolutions were moved by Jai Narain Vyas who drew up a scheme to be adopted to improve the lot of villages.<sup>33</sup>

The *Marwar Lok Parishad* between September to December 1939 focussed mainly on three issues to build up a powerful mass



movement. The first issue was related to the famine conditions and famine relief policy. The workers of the *Parishad* propagated that the peasants' inability to face the famine conditions was due to their poor economic conditions which was the result of economic exploitation by the State and Jagirdars. The famine of 1939 was very much severe, the like of which had not been experienced for many decades. There was an acute shortage of food, fodder and drinking water in the villages. Some relief measures were adopted by the State which could not cater to the need of the hour as the Jagirdars did nothing in this direction. Further, whatever relief was available could not reach the distressed people due to corrupt and inefficient administrative machinery. On the one hand, the *Parishad* criticised the famine relief policy, and took up the cause of the suffering masses in its hands, on the other. The *Marwar Lok Parishad* emerged as the real mass party.

Secondly, the Second World War broke-out in September, 1939 and the *Parishad* opposed the measures adopted by the government to support the War. The government not only extended military support but also contributed money to the British for War efforts. The *Parishad's* view behind the opposition was clear that the people were dying of starvation and the state was sending huge amounts for war.

Thirdly, the *Parishad* began a campaign against the Jagirdars as 87% area of the State was held by them. To win over the large mass support it was essential to the *Parishad* to clinch the issues relating to the masses of Jagirs. In 1936 many *lag-bags* (Cesses) were abolished by the State but the Jagirdars continued to levy them. *Begar* was rampant in the Jagir areas. There were no land rules and the peasants depended on the mercy of the Jagirdars who could extract land-revenue and other taxes as much as he could and eject the peasants from their holdings at any time on any pretext. The *Parishad* advised the cultivators to agitate against the Jagirdari system.

Jai Narain Vyas, the main leader of the *Parishad* resigned in December 1939 from the membership of the government agencies such as the Central Advisory Board, the Standing Famine Relief Advisory Committee, the Education Reforms Committee, the Doles Committee, the Unemployment Committee and

Tuberculosis Committee.<sup>34</sup> The resignation was meant to expose these committees which were doing nothing in the public interest. It was also not possible for Vyas to prevail upon these committees where the majority was of the government members. This act of Vyas also added much to the popularity of the *Parishad*. The State authority feared the activities of the *Parishad* and the Chief Minister threatened the use of the Defence of India ordinance against the members of the *Parishad*. Ultimately the Government of Jodhpur declared the *Marwar Lok Parishad* an illegal organisation on 28th March, 1940.<sup>35</sup> On the same date the State Police arrested the prominent leaders and took them to various forts where they were left for an year's incarceration.

The repressive policy of the State towards the *Marwar Lok Parishad* was due to its penetration in the rural areas. The *Parishad* already called the peasants for revolt against the Jagirdars. Col. D.M. Field, Chief Minister of Jodhpur State, sent a circular on 1st March, 1940 to all the Jagirdars and District officers of the State. This circular reflects the State's view about the affair. He wrote that "His Highness's Government desires to inform you that the members of the *Lok Parishad* in Jodhpur, a political body professing revolutionary ideas, are engaged busily in opening branches of the society in the various districts and *thikanas* in Marwar. They are touring in the various Jagir towns and villages with avowed object of fomenting trouble between the Jagirdars and ryots."

I would advise you, therefore, to instruct all your officials to keep a vigilant eye on the activities of the *Lok Parishad* members and to make a note of what they do and say in public meetings etc. A detailed report, on the doings of the *Lok Parishad* members and the speeches, which they deliver in any of your Jagir villages may kindly be sent to me,"

The above shows that the State Government was afraid of the *Parishad's* anti-Jagirdar policies and activities. The *Parishad's* anti-Jagirdar and anti-war activities became so serious that the Maharaja himself was compelled to come out and justify the action of his government. In a statement he clarified, "I do not consider it consistent with my duty as a loyal ally of the British Government to allow a groundless political agitation to grow and spread

in my state in time of war nor I am prepared any longer to allow an open campaign of subversive agitation manifestly designed to encourage our peasantry to revolt and to corrupt our youth.”<sup>36</sup>

The *Marwar Lok Parishad* had emerged as a deeprooted organisations. Even after the repressive measures the *Parishad's* campaign remained continued. The *Parishad's* workers in absence of their leaders compelled the government to abolish the ban from the organisation and release the leaders. The government released the leaders in June, 1940 and the *Lok Parishad* got State's recognition under an agreement between the Government and the *Lok Parishad*.<sup>37</sup>

In February 1941 the *Marwar Lok Parishad* Constituted a Jagir Committee to enquire into the *lag-bag*, *begar* and rate of land revenue.<sup>38</sup> The said Committee made a detailed enquiry into the above points. It reported that the method of land revenue assessment and collection was defective. The most prevalent method was *Latai*. Under the system the standing crop was assessed by the Jagir Officials and on this rough estimate the share of the Jagir was calculated. In fact it was a short of *Batai* (share-cropping) system under which the peasants had got no rights of land tenure. The system made them tenants at will. In addition to land revenue under *Latai* method a number of cesses were levied and sometimes the amount of cesses was almost double of the land-revenue. In Jagir areas remission was not allowed even in famine years and in case of non-payment of land revenue and cesses due to hardship the arrears were collected with interest in normal years. Sometimes the belongings of the peasants such as ornaments, utensils, bullocks, cows, agricultural implements were seized and auctioned to meet out the amount of arrears. Further, *begar* was also in vogue which was based on inhuman values. This was no less than slavery.

All the above findings of the Jagir Committee of the *Marwar Lok Parishad* made the Jagir issues an important public issue. The *Parishad* during 1941-42 concentrated on the Jagir issue. In March 1941 the *Parishad* launched its anti-Jagirdar campaign. The workers of the *Parishad* dispersed all over the Jagir villages and organised several meetings and peasants were persuaded not to pay *lag-bags* and not to perform *begar*. Along with this the

peasants also demanded occupancy rights on their holdings. The *Marwar Lok Parishad*'s workers organised *prabhat pheris* in Jagir headquarters to boost up the morale and courage of the peasants. The issues taken up by the agitators were mainly related to those cesses which were prohibited by the State. For instance the *Kansa Lag* was levied by the Jagirdars on the occasion of feast given by the peasants. This *lag* was declared illegal by the Chief Court in its judgement dated 17th March, 1938, but the Jagirdars continued to levy this. In the meantime Jai Narain Vyas published a booklet entitled *Gair Kanooni Lagan* (Illegal Cesses) in two parts. He wrote in the preface to its first part: "There are many cesses which are prohibited in Marwar. Some cesses have been declared illegal by the courts, but still they are being levied in many Jagirs in the manner as if they were legal. It is impossible to implement the Government's orders on the issue of not to levy prohibited and illegal cesses unless legal action is taken and adequate punishment is given to those Jagirdars who collect such cesses." He urged the educated youth to enlighten the innocent villagers to resist payment of illegal cesses.<sup>39</sup>

The anti-cess movement launched by the *Marwar Lok Parishad* spread all over the Jagir villages of Jodhpur State. During this movement the *Lok Parishad* never opposed the Jagirdari system as such. Mathura Das Mathur, the President of the *Marwar Lok Parishad*, made it clear in a letter dated 6 June, 1941 to the councillor to Maharaja of Jodhpur. He wrote "The *Lok Parishad* has never declared the elimination of Jagirdari as its policy nor does it stand for creating a gulf between the Jagirdars and their tenants. What it stands for is that the poor peasants and people residing in Jagir areas should not be illegally exploited"<sup>40</sup>

The above movement alarmed the Jagirdars. Though the *Marwar Lok Parishad* did not demand the abolition of the Jagir system but its movement proved an attack on the roots of Jagirdari system. The Jagirdars held a secret meeting on 15th April, 1941 to form an organisation against the *Lok Parishad*.<sup>41</sup> In pursuance of this meeting's decision the Jagirdars Association came into being. A caste organisation known as *Rajput Sabha*, which was established in 1935, also came to the rescue of Jagirdars as most of the Jagirdars belonged to this community. Both the organisations joined hands against the *Lok Parishad* and launched an anti-*Lok*

*Parishad* campaign through inflicting *Zulams* upon the peasants and workers of the *Parishad*. They also threatened the leaders of the *Parishad* like Jai Narain Vyas and Mathura Das Mathur with dire consequences if they and their followers entered the Jagir villages. Both the organisation of Rajputs and Jagirdars were working with the support and guidance of the State. These organisation failed in countering the *Lok Parishad's* movement, as they lacked the mass support.

The irritated Jagirdars stopped the *latai* and prevented the peasants from taking the produce without *latai*.<sup>42</sup> They created a dead lock which was adversely affecting the peasants as they were in need of grain and other produce. The Jagirdars wanted to collect the revenue with *Lag-bags* and the peasants did not agree to it. On the complaints of the *Lok Parishad* and peasants the Government of Jodhpur ordered on 20th May, 1941, that the Jagirdars should perform the *latai* within 15 days otherwise Hakim of the *pargana* would perform *latai* and give the peasants their share.<sup>43</sup> The Jagirdars feared that if they did not conduct the *latai* they would be prevented from their age-old rights.

The Rajput Sabha and Jagirdars Association in a joint session on 6th June, 1941 formed a committee to counteract the *Lok Parishad's* activities collectively. They also resolved to help individual Jagirdars against any mass refusal of payment of *lag-bag*.<sup>44</sup> The Jagirdars also represented to the Government on 8th June, 1941 that the agitators, who were outsider agencies, not responsible to us or your ryots, had exploited the ignorance of the masses to lead a 'no-rent' campaign with a view to assuming the leadership of the peasantry in the movement and for all times.<sup>45</sup> The Chief Minister's order of May, 1941, regarding *Latai* was withdrawn on 30th June, 1941 as it hurt the feelings of the Jagirdars.<sup>46</sup> The Jagirdars forcibly collected the land-revenue with *lag-bags*. In fact the Jagirdars impressed upon the Government that they were capable of combating the situation if the State extended its support to them. The disputes between the peasants and Jagirdars did not end here and violent clashes took place in Jagir villages. The Government of Jodhpur was adopting every measure to check the peasant movement. On the one

hand, the State gave free hand to the Jagirdars and, on the other, it tried to settle the matter peacefully. The councillor to the Maharaja interviewed the representatives of the *Marwar Lok Parishad*, the *Rajput Sabha* and the Jagirdars Association and proposed to establish Central and District Conciliation Boards. The District Boards were empowered to settle the issues between peasants and Jagirdars. The Central Board was conferred powers to examine cases unsettled by the District Boards and to act as an appellate body also. The Government agreed to the proposal and established the Conciliation Boards on 30th June, 1941.<sup>47</sup> The objects behind the formation of these Boards was to help the Jagirdars and to give false comfort to the peasants. It also aimed at neutralising the movement and to break the peasant base of the *Marwar Lok Parishad*.

The Conciliation Boards so constituted had five members each. The persons on each Board were to be as follows :

- (a) The *Hakim* of the *Pargana* (District) as the President.
- (b) Two Jagirdars of that *Pargana* selected by the Jagirdar's Association and approved by the Government.
- (c) Two cultivators of good status of the *Pargana* from disputed villages. *Hakims* were empowered to select the cultivators.

The constitution of the above Boards shows that it was formed to support the Jagirdars. The *Marwar Lok Parishad* which was looking into the interests of the peasants was completely ignored by the Government. These Board could not succeed in resolving the problem due to various reasons. Firstly, the majority of the members was pro-government and pro-Jagirdars and they were not interested any agrarian reforms; rather they were trying to maintain the *status-quo*. Secondly, the number of disputes were so large that they could not be settled even in one or two decades by these Boards. Thirdly, the decisions of these Board were not accepted by the peasants enmass without involvement of the *Marwar Lok Parishad* upon whom they relied. Though, the Boards became meaningless but they succeeded in creating confusion among the peasantry and weakened the movement for some months. The peasants felt that they had been deceived by the Government and Jagirdars, and when the

peasants reorganised their movement they became more sharp and bitter.

Another mischievous act of the Government to harm the peasant's cause was to encourage the formation of the *Marwar Kisan Sabha*. The State wanted to curtail the peasant base of the *Marwar Lok Parishad*. To counteract its position among the peasants the Government encouraged the formation of the *Marwar Kisan Sabha* which came into existence on 22nd March, 1941.<sup>48</sup> The main organiser and patron of this was Baldeo Ram Mirdha, who was Superintendent of Police, Jodhpur and belonged to Jat community. He was a humble and reliable servant of the Raj and rose from the position of a clerk to the rank of I.G.P. in 1943.<sup>49</sup> The Jats were in large number among the peasants and Mirdha exploited them for his personal ends. He came to the rescue of his master as a loyal servant. The first President of the *Kisan Sabha* was Mangal Singh Kachhawah who was a *thekedar* (contractor) by profession.<sup>50</sup> The *Marwar Kisan Sabha* was also against the *Lag bag*, forced labour and *Latai* system but it opposed the working of *The Marwar Lok Parishad*. The *Kisan Sabha* also advised the peasants to keep away from the agitators of the *Lok Parishad*.<sup>51</sup> The *Kisan Sabha* leaders propagated that the *Lok Parishad* was an organisation of the upper castes and it had nothing to do with the peasant castes. If they succeeded in getting the so-called 'Responsible Government' they would have the monopoly of political power and the peasants and down-trodden castes would be neglected by them.

The establishment of the Conciliation Boards could not solve the problem. In September 1941 many incidents of peasants harrasment by the Jagirdars took place.<sup>52</sup> The inhuman and unlawful actions of the Jagirdars continued. They seized and auctioned the cattle, utensils, etc. belonging of the peasants to meet the land revenue. Their grain produce was sealed and they were prevented from tilling their lands. Their houses were looted and burn to ashes. Not only this, some of the Jagirdars even imposed new taxes. The repression by Jagirdars was not confined to the peasants; the Jagirdars also aimed at humiliating and suppressing the leaders and workers of the *Marwar Lok Parishad* also. The Jagirdars of Pargana Sojat, Bilara and Jaitaran collectively decided that if the *Lok Parishad* members visited their

villages, they should be beaten and thrown out of the villages and their meetings should be dispersed. Some leaders like Chaudhary Uma Ram, Chhagan Raj Chopasniwala, Kahnyan Lal Vaidhya, Inder Mal, Mohan Lal Joshi and Swami Chaindas were insulted and also assaulted at various places.<sup>53</sup> A reign of terror was let loose in the Jagir villages.

The *Marwar Kisan Sabha* tried to create confusion but due to lack of mass support it could not succeed. The *Lok Parishad* workers were facing the atrocities with courage. In some areas the peasants also began to organise themselves. The Jat peasantry of Nagaur Pargana arose under the leadership of the *Jat Krishak Sudharak Sabha*, which was established in 1938.<sup>54</sup> It was a social reform organisation which was operating among the Jats for their social upliftment. When the Jagirdars inflicted *Zulams* upon the peasant the majority of victims were the Jats. The *Sudharak Sabha* came forward in rescue of the Jats. This organisation was not a political one and obviously its activities were not contrary to the *Lok Parishad*. On 19th September 1941 the *Jat Krishak Sudharak Sabha* organised a meeting and demanded land settlement in Jagir areas and occupancy rights to the peasants, abolition of excessive land revenue, cesses and forced labour and depriving the Jagirdars of autocratic powers.<sup>55</sup>

The above activities strengthened the peasants' cause and their movement. Now it became necessary for the *Kisan Sabha* due to its political and social rivalry with the *Marwar Lok Parishad* and the *Jat Krishak Sudharak Sangh* to take up the cause of peasantry. The *Kisan Sabha* issued a number of bulletins supporting the peasants' demands for which the above organisations were already struggling. Their main stress was on the abolition of *Lag-bag*, *begar* and excessive land revenue.<sup>56</sup> On the demand of the *Kisan Sabha* and to raise its popularity among the peasants the Government of Jodhpur appointed a special land rent and *lag-bag* committee on 16th October, 1941 to investigate into the complaints made in the bulletins of the *Kisan Sabha*.<sup>57</sup> With the formation of the special committee a large number of petitions were made by the peasants from every corner of the State. This committee also proved futile as no substantive work was done by it. In fact the new committee was creating confusions and lingering the matter to



weaken the peasant movement. By the end of January 1942 the *Kisan Sabha* itself became desperate and gave an open call to the peasants to resist the illegal taxes etc. The organisation which was formed to serve and support the order was now transforming into a real mass organisation. The change in the tune of the *Kisan Sabha* was due to the repressive policies of the Jagirdars. They did not spare the leaders and followers of the *Kisan Sabha* as they were beaten mercilessly and treated in a humiliating manner by the Jagirdars' henchmen.

The Jagirdars organised the Rajputs on communal basis and they started attacking the peasants who were mostly Jats. In 1942 the Jat-Rajput rivalry began and communal riots between both the communities took place on a large scale. In these circumstances it was not possible for the *Kisan Sabha* to keep mum. The *Kisan Sabha* represented before the Government through bulletins and brought the Jagirdars atrocities into light. In bulletin No. 2 it mentioned about a Jagir village Gajoo of Pargana Nagaur as follows.

"There were about 30 or 40 *Kisans* in this village but owing to heavy taxation and other reasons these are now only 18. But the amount of *Kharda Lags* is the same which is paid by these 18 instead of 40. The Officers of the court of wards and Hasiyat are all Jagirdars, though well-educated, yet they pay no attention for the welfare of the helpless *Kisans* who are like dumb creatures."

In bulletin No. 4 it further complained about the *thikana* of Asop that "This year the Cash amount of numerous *lags* of two years including last famine, could not be easily paid by the poor *Kisans* on account of the continuous famines and marriages in their families, but the *thikana* armed and mounted party arrested the leading *Kisans*, kept them in Asop Kot in confinement, used force and extorted a sum of Rs. 500/- on or about 26th August, 1941, in addition to the payment of about 60% grain of their produce. This was due to the direct and immediate result of holding a large meeting of about 200 Jagirdars and Rajputs in Asop Kot in August last wherein Thakur Sahib Asop was much persuaded to take a lead in using force."

The *Kisan Sabha* from January 1942 onward continued its anti-Jagirdar campaign. It did not co-operate with the *Marwar Lok Parishad* but its activities helped the *parishad* automatically as the cause of both was similar. The peasant movement of Jodhpur State in 1942 entered a new phase but remained divided for a long time.

### **The Marwar Lok Parishad and Chandawal Tragedy 1942**

The *Marwar Lok Parishad* held an open session on 8th February, 1942 at Ladnu in which political workers of all parts and organisations participated. The *Parishad* criticised the special land rent and *Lag-bag* committee for doing nothing in the direction of abolishing cesses and forced labour and demanded the immediate abolition of these. The problems of the peasants of Jagir areas were discussed at length. Ranchordas Gattani in his Presidential address assessed the contemporary situation. He remarked that unemployment was on the increase and the wages of the peasants were meagre. The people were subjected to the tyranny of the *thanedars*, *hawaldars* and Jagirdars. He further stressed that until the *Parishad* secured a responsible government the ministers would not be responsible to the people and the administration would not feel themselves as servants of the people; so long as this was not possible, the woes of the cultivators of the labourers and the unemployed would not end. The *Lok Parishad* had to create a public opinion for a responsible government, spread the *Parishad's* teachings to every house, and the Government should realise that the voice of the *Parishad* was the voice of the people of Marwar.<sup>58</sup>

The Chandawal branch of the *Marwar Lok Parishad* planned to celebrate *Responsible Government Day* on 28th March, 1942. Chandawal was a Jagir village in the *Pargana* Sojat. The workers of the *Parishad* were invited to attend the ceremony from all over the *Pargana*. The Jagirdar of Chandawal did not allow them to organise the function in the village. The workers reached Chandawal for celebration. The annoyed Jagirdar ordered his police, henchmen and hooligans to attack the workers of the *Marwar Lok Parishad*. The *thikana* men attacked the workers with *Lathis* and spears in which 25 workers were severely wounded.<sup>59</sup>

On the 28th March 1942 the *Marwar Lok Parishad* celebrated Responsible Government Day all over Jodhpur State.<sup>60</sup> After the session at Ladnu the Jagirdars became furious and on 28th March 1942 incidents like that of Chandawal took place at the *thikanas* of Nimaj, Gundoj, Rodu and Dhamli.

In protest against these incidents the *Parishad* began *Satyagraha* in April, 1942 and by the end of May 1942 all the prominent leaders were arrested. The anti-Jagirdari movement launched by the *Parishad* came to end and the movement for civil rights, release of political leaders and establishment of responsible government was concentrated within Jodhpur city. In the absence of prominent leaders the second rank leaders continued the movement which compelled the Government to release their leaders in May, 1944.

From May 1942 to May 1944 the *Marwar Lok Parishad's* activities remained confined to the city of Jodhpur but it did not give up the cause of the peasantry.

### **Movement under the Leadership of the Marwar Kisan Sabha**

The *Marwar Kisan Sabha* became active after May 1922 as the *Lok Parishad's* activities in the rural areas became weak. Though contradictions existed between the *Kisan Sabha* and the Jagirdars but the State was much liberal towards the *Kisan Sabha* due to some reasons. Firstly, the State wanted to cut the *Lok Parishad's* political base through the *Kisan Sabha*. Secondly, the peasant movements became a serious threat to the existence of the Jagirdars who desperately needed the State's help and this brought the Jagirdars in the control of the State.

On 9th June, 1942 the *Marwar Kisan Sabha* issued a bulletin in which it thanked the *Lok Parishad* for starting a movement for the abolition of illegal *Lag-bags* and for advising the peasants not to pay them. But on the other, the *Kisan Sabha* opposed the agitation launched under the pretext that only the establishment of responsible government would solve their problem. In the opinion of the *Kisan Sabha* it did not appear to be beneficial to the *Kisans*. Nor did it agree with the description of the existing Government of Marwar as irresponsible.<sup>61</sup> In fact, the *Kisan Sabha* opposed the

*Lok Parishad's* movement openly and took the advantage of the situation arising from the state's attack on the *Parishad*. Through the said bulletin the *Kisan Sabha* again put forward its long standing demands. The main demand were as follows :

- (1) The exorbitant and unjustified *lag-bags* in the Jagir villages should be abolished at once.
- (2) A Tenancy Act should be passed to define the rights and privilege of the tenants and their relations with the Jagirdars.
- (3) Land settlement should be made in Jagirs.

The Government took a sympathetic attitude towards these demands but it could not concede them due to the opposition of the *Marwar Rajput Sabha* and the Jagirdars Association. The untiring efforts of the *Kisan Sabha* eventually compelled the Government to order land settlement in the Jagirs. On 2nd December, 1943, the Revenue Minister issued the orders for conducting settlement operations in the Jagir Villages.<sup>62</sup>

The Jagirdars decided to boycott the Jagir settlement work conducted by the Government.<sup>63</sup> The Jagirdars decided to protest through their organisations. They created many obstacles in the settlement work and by the end of 1945 nothing was done in this regard. The *Marwar Kisan Sabha* due to its loyalty to the Maharaja was not able to push the peasant movement vigorously. All the legal measures adopted by the *Kisan Sabha* failed in securing relief for peasants from the feudal oppression. The *Marwar Kisan Sabha* organised a *Kisan Sammelan* at Jodhpur on 25th September, 1945. The *Sabha* invited prominent peasant leaders from other parts of the country who were mostly Jats. Choudhary Chhotu Ram of Punjab was a name among the Jats of northern India; he also attended the above peasant conference. The *Sammelan* was also attended by the Maharaja himself with his ministers and officers on the invitation and request of Baldev Ram Mirdha, the D. I. G. of Police, who was the main organiser of the *Kisan Sabha* and this conference.<sup>64</sup> Baldev Ram Mirdha in his message told to the peasants that "You have not to do any type of violent movement. We are not against the Jagirdars at all, and hate the sin not the sinner. We are against the evils of Jagiri system which we have to erode. The evils of Jagiri system which cause your

miseries should be fought out in the courts of law; definitely you would get justice.”<sup>65</sup>

The above conference proved futile. Logically, it was not possible to fight feudalism under feudal legal system itself. When many cesses were exempted by the State in 1936 the Jagirdars did not comply with this. Again in 1938 the courts of law also declared the same as illegal cesses. But even upto 1945 the Jagirdars continued to levy them. Not only this, by 1945 some new *lag-bags* were introduced in some Jagirs.

### **Joint Movement of the Marwar Lok Parishad and the Marwar Kisan Sabha (1946-1948)**

The atrocities and oppression of the Jagirdars on peasantry were increasing day by day. The followers of the *Kisan Sabha* became desperate with its policies. In January, 1946 its policy was changed and the *Kisan Sabha* joined hands with the *Marwar Lok Parishad* for the abolition of the Jagirdari System. Both the organisations launched a joint movement to achieve a responsible government as the *Kisan Sabha* also came to share the view that only responsible government would be able to abolish the Jagirdari system.

The Jagirdars were alarmed by the joint movement and they became more violent. They adopted extreme measures to curb the political movement which aimed at abolition of the Jagirdari system. They created an atmosphere of terror among the peasantry. Not only the ordinary peasants but their leaders too became victims of this terror. Severe clashes took place between the Jagirdars and peasant leaders and these reached a climax on 13th March, 1947 at a village Dabra where the Jagirdars attacked a *Kisan Sammelan*.

The *Marwar Lok Parishad* and the *Marwar Kisan Sabha* decided to hold a joint session on 13th March, 1947 at a village Dabra in Didwana district.<sup>66</sup> The announcement of the conference made the Jagirdars sit up and this time they determined to teach a lesson to the political agitators. About one thousand Rajputs gathered at Dabra three days before the conference. When at 9 00 A. M. the proceedings of the conference began the Jagirdars with their caste men suddenly encircled the assembly of the

conference. The leaders and participants were beaten mercilessly with *lathies* and other lethal weapons. The village was also surrounded by the hooligans and none of the participant was allowed to run. The houses of the peasants were looted and set on fire and women were raped.<sup>67</sup> In this incident nearly 12 persons lost their lives and hundreds were wounded. The leaders were taken to the *kot* where they were humiliated and they were freed by the intervention of Seth Dugarji of Molasaar.

This incident evoked wide-spread protest in the press and public meetings were held. The movement for responsible government entered a new phase after this incident. After 15th August, 1947 the movement accelerated in the changed political conditions of the country. The Maharaja tried to consolidate his position through reviving the feudal order in an arch reactionary form. He also tried to join Pakistan. The Government of India was not unaware of what was happening in Jodhpur. V. P. Menon, the Secretary of States, Government of India, visited Jodhpur on 28th February, 1948 to intervene between the State and agitators. On 17th June, 1948 a popular interim ministry was formed in Jodhpur State. Jai Narain Vyas became the Prime Minister and Nathuram Mirdha of the *Marwar Kisan Sabha* was sworn as the Agriculture Minister.<sup>68</sup> The Jagirdars started ejecting the peasants from their holdings in an arbitrary manner. On 22nd June, 1948 the Prime Minister issued a notification that no arbitrary ejection by the Jagirdars would be treated as valid.<sup>69</sup> On 6th April, 1949 The Marwar Tenancy Act was passed<sup>70</sup>. This Act changed the position of the peasants which previously was nothing more than tenant at will. Now they were conferred *Khatedri* (occupancy) rights. Thus a long struggle came to a successful end.

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## PEASANT MOVEMENT IN ALWAR AND BHARATPUR STATES

### ALWAR STATE

The State of Alwar had a different system of land revenue and administration. Here 80% land was under the *Khalsa* area while only 20% under the Jagirs or *Ghair-Khalsa*. Obviously, the number of Jagirdars was very few. Most of the Jagirdars held petty Jagirs ranging from 10 bighas to 5 villages and no Jagirdar was conferred judiciary powers. The condition of peasantry was satisfactory in comparison with the peasants of the other States of Rajasthan. Due to its proximity to Delhi and Agra cities, Punjab and United Provinces, the State's outlook remained very much progressive.

A large number of peasants had permanent occupancy land rights who were known as *biswadars* in the *Khalsa* area.<sup>1</sup> In most of the cases the peasants rights were secured on their holdings. They could not be ejected from their holdings as far as they paid the land revenue without default. The worst system of land revenue was *Ijara* system. The first regular settlement of land was made in 1876 in which all the land was assessed on the lines of the British practice and cash rents were introduced. In *Khalsa* area more or less all the tenures were similar to *Ryatwari* System.

Though all the rules and regulations and peasants rights were well defined but the peasant was not free from feudal exploitation. The first land settlement was made for twenty years. The second settlement was carried on in 1899 in which the State enhanced the land revenue and it was fixed between  $1/2$  and  $1/5$

of the gross produce. The third settlement was made in 1922 which further enhanced the volume of the amount of land revenue. The number of cesses was not much but the land revenue was equally exorbitant. *Begar* for the State purposes was abolished in the settlement of 1899.<sup>2</sup>

In fact the peasants were also victims of feudal and colonial exploitation but it was not in so crude a form as in the other States of Rajasthan. The Jagirdars being few and petty were not much powerful economically and socially. The peasant were free from social humiliation at the hands of the Jagirdars. The *begar* system was confined within some Jagirs which held not more than 10% of land.

In the State of Alwar any powerful peasant movement could not arise because the peasants were satisfied to some extent, although it cannot be claimed that there was no peasant movement there. The peasant movements of the Alwar State may be divided into three parts, viz. movement of petty Jagirdars and Rajputs 1925, the Meo uprising 1932-33 and moderate movement under Praja Mandal 1942-47.

# I

The third land settlement was conducted in 1922 and new rates of land revenue were executed in the year 1923-24.<sup>3</sup> Upto the second settlement caste discrimination was taken into account in fixing the land revenue. The Rajputs and Brahmins were among the favoured castes who paid less land-revenue in comparison with the other castes. But in the third settlement the caste discrimination was abolished. This caused discontentment among the Rajputs of both categories, viz. petty Jagirdars and ordinary peasant mostly *Biswadars*. Secondly, under the new settlement the rates of land revenue were also increased. The Rajput *biswadars* and petty Jagirdars of Tehsils Thanagazi and Bansur decided that they would not pay the land revenue at the new rates and they launched a campaign against it. To mount the pressure of Rajputs upon the Maharaja several meetings were organised at different villages in October 1924.<sup>4</sup> The State ignored all these happenings.

The leaders of the above campaign decided to seek the support from all the Rajput sources and they appealed to the Rajputs of Alwar State and also to those living outside. Nearly two hundred Rajputs of Alwar had attended the session of the All India *Kshatriya Mahasabha* held at Delhi in January, 1925. They submitted their grievances before the *Mahasabha* and requested it to support their cause.<sup>5</sup> In this session they got sympathy and encouragement and they accelerated their campaign.

After the session of the *Kshatriya Mahasabha* the campaign snowballed into an agitation. The leaders prepared a list of their grievances to be put before the Maharaja. Their main demands were as follows.<sup>6</sup>

- (1) At the time of the last settlement the Rajputs were given some privileges in land revenue but now no difference has been made and the rates of the land revenue are equal for all. Revenue on land holdings of the Rajputs be charged at favourable rates as was done in the last settlement and enhanced land revenue be reduced.
- (2) Grazing tax be charged only from those whose cattle go to pasture in reserve forests.
- (3) New *Roondhs* (reserve forests for hunting) be not created and they should be allowed to kill the wild animals as they caused heavy loss to their crops.
- (4) *Banjar* (uncultivated) lands of their area should not be auctioned to outsiders.
- (5) The lands donated to temples in *Muaji* should not be confiscated.

The demands were not considered justified by the State, so the Rajputs represented before the Agent to the Governor-General in Rajputana. They also decided not to pay the land revenue till their demand were conceded. Accordingly, the Rajputs stopped the payment of the land revenue. When the State authorities sealed their grain in the threshing fields, they took away the grain by force.<sup>7</sup>

The Rajputs started collecting swords, spears and guns to face any move against them. The Rajputs who had remained loyal to the Maharaja all the time, were now annoyed with him.

The Rajputs who were the source of power of the Maharaja before the coming of the British, were now neglected. The Rajputs decided to fight the injustice imposed upon them by the State. The State Government took precautionary measures and the Prime Minister issued an order on 6th May, 1925 that no person or group of persons should move with arms within the jurisdiction of police stations of Thanagazi, Bansur, Narainpur, Malakera, Rajgarh and Behror for a period of one month.<sup>8</sup> The main centre of the Rajput agitation became a village, Neemuchana, as its *Thakur* was the main organiser of the movement. In the beginning of May, 1925 Rajputs in large numbers assembled at Neemuchana and stationed there.

The Maharaja of Alwar appointed a commission to enquire into the matter on the spot. The commission reached Neemuchana on 7th May, 1925.<sup>9</sup> The said commission proved nothing more than an intelligence mission. Though the commission talked to the main Rajput leaders but nothing substantive could be done. To my mind this commission was meant to enquire into the preparations of the Rajput assembly at Neemuchana as after 7 days the State troops attacked the village instead of considering the grievances.

The Maharaja was reluctant on this issue and he was not in favour of any concession due to various reasons. Firstly, the policy of appeasement could spread the trouble to other parts also. Secondly, the amendment in the land revenue system was not possible. Thirdly, the Maharaja was himself in trouble as he was not having good relations with the British. On some pretext or the other, the British wanted to deprive him of his powers. Fourthly, after the withdrawal of the Non-Co-operation Movement in 1922 it was the general policy of the British to suppress any type of mass uprising by force. Keeping all these factors in view of the government of Alwar decided to suppress the agitation by force. Military forces reached Neemuchana on 13th May, 1925 and encircled the village and compelled the *Thakur* to give up the agitation. In the morning of 14th May, 1925 the military forces opened fire with machine guns. The entire village was set on fire and reduced to ashes. In this operation nearly 156 men killed and 600 wounded.<sup>10</sup>

The Neemuchana incident was described by the newspapers as *Neemuchana Kand* and attracted the public attention all over India. The *Rajasthan Seva Sangh* enquired into the matter and published the whole story in *Tarun Rajasthan* in the issue of 31st May, 1925. The *Riyasat* compared it with the *Jallian-Wala Haiya Kand*.<sup>11</sup> Thirty nine persons were tried by a special court. The proceedings began on 3rd June and on 8th July the special court gave its decision. Out of 39 persons under trial 9 were discharged and 30 were sentenced to various terms. But by January all the convicts were given pardon by the Maharaja.<sup>12</sup> The families who suffered human loss were given Rs. 128/- each from the treasury. Their main demand was conceded and orders were issued on 18th November, 1925 that land revenue would be charged according to the old settlement till the expiry of the settlement of 1922.<sup>13</sup>

On analysis it is apparent that the movement of Neemuchana was not a peasant movement in the true sense. It was the result of the contradictions which existed within the feudalism. The agitators were not inspired by any national sentiments or upheaval. It was an agitation of privileged castes which could not spread among other peasants.

## II

The Meo peasantry of Alwar State came out into open rebellion in the year 1932-33. The Meo agitation was widespread in area and nature in comparison with the Neemuchana movement. The area inhabited by the Meos is known as *Mewat* which comprised the area of the former princely States of Alwar and Bharatpur in Rajasthan and Gurgaon District of former Punjab. The Meos, a self-contained semi-tribal community, had formal affinity to Islam. They were considered peaceful and hard-working peasants. The Meos came into lime light in 1921 when under the influence of the Non-Co-operation and *Khilafat* movements they revolted. In December 1921 the Meos from Alwar attacked a police station in the neighbouring Gurgaon district and had to be suppressed through a joint operation by British Indian Police and Alwar State troops.<sup>14</sup> Though this movement was not widespread but it brought the isolated community in the main stream of the country.

In 1929-30 a global economic crisis engulfed the whole world and the European colonies were the worst affected. Obviously, the British economic burden directly hit the Indian economy. In India it affected the lower strata of the society, the peasants and workers. In the year 1930 the civil Disobedience Movement launched by the Indian National Congress paved the way to fight against the colonialism. Gandhi initiated the Movement on 12th March, 1930 with his Dandi March and provisionally suspended it on 5th March, 1931 due to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact. Gandhi attended the Second Round Table conference and returned home at the end of 1931 greatly disappointed and talked of resuming the civil disobedience movement. In January 1932 Gandhi and other leaders were arrested and the Congress was declared an illegal organisation. The second phase of the Civil Disobedience Movement induced much courage among the Indian masses. The Meo uprising of 1932 in Alwar did not arise as the part of the Civil Disobedience Movement, but it was influenced by this great national upheaval.

The new land revenue settlement enacted in the year 1923-24 caused discontentment among the peasants. We have seen that this was resented by the *biswudars* and petty Jagirdars in the year 1925. The massacre of Neemuchana created fear in the mind of the peasants of other parts of Alwar State. The Meos, who constituted a large numerical strength and were concentrated in a certain area, raised the banner of revolt against the State.

Some authors had described it a communal upsurge against the Hindus to which the agrarian demands were added later on. In fact initially it was an economic struggle of the Meo peasantry and some communal leaders did try to give it a communal colour. The nature of their main grievances and demands further strengthened the view that it was an economic struggle. They said that the burden of land revenue and other taxes was very high and so it should be brought down to the level of the neighbouring district of Gurgaon in British India. For instance the land revenue charged on irrigated land in Gurgaon district was Rs. 1-2-0 per bigha, while in the Alwar State it ranged from Rs. 8 to Rs. 4.2-0 per bigha.<sup>15</sup> For the lands which were acqui-

sitioned for government purpose i.e. for roads, dam etc., compensation was not paid to the peasants. The Meos compared their land revenue system and administration with that of the Gurgaon district and demanded parity with that. During famines the state of Alwar never gave remission and land revenue suspended during the famine years was charged as arrears with the land revenue of normal years. The famine relief works began by the State were not appropriate and the famine-stricken people managed to survive on their own resources of borrowing. The *takavi* loans sanctioned to the peasants during famine and in abnormal years some time caused trouble and harrassment instead of convenience. Their demand was that famine relief, suspension and remission of land revenue and *takavi* loans should be governed in the same way as in the Gurgaon district. There were many *roondhs* (State's reserve-forests and hunting forests) within the Meo areas. The wild animal of these *roondhs* caused damage to crops and peasants were not allowed to kill them for the protection of their crops. They demanded that the number and size of these *roondhs* should be reduced and they might be allowed to kill the wild animals. The custom duties levied on export and import of cattle was also a grievance of the peasants. Though, *begar* (forced labour) was abolished but the government officials continued it unofficially. The Meos demanded the abolition of *begar* which was taken for making dams and roads, cutting grass, clearing *roondhs* and during hunting tours of the Maharaja.<sup>16</sup>

The above grievances compelled the Meos to revolt. There were also some communal demands which arose during the revolt. The Meos were annoyed with the State as they were treated inhumanly in 1921, so this time their movement was more powerful and they began a guerrilla war<sup>17</sup>. The *Indian Annual Register* spoke of 80-90,000 Meos participating in this revolt. The Meos of Bharatpur State also joined this and the Meos of the Gurgaon district gave all type of help and support to the revolting Meos.

In the beginning of 1932 the Meos of the *Nizamats* (districts) of Tijara, Kishangarh, Ramgarh and Lachmangarh refused the payment of land revenue of *Kharif* season as the crops were damaged by flood. The Meos feared that the authorities could take repressive measures to crush them and they discussed the



matter in their caste *panchayat* held at various places. This was a spontaneous move which not only alarmed the government but also agitated the Hindu minds and both thought that the Meo moves were directed against them. During these *panchayats* they prepared a long list of their economic and social grievances.

Here it will be pertinent to explain some communal happenings. A Muslim organisation known as *Anjuman-i-Khadim-ul-Islam* was operating among the Meos of Alwar for social upliftment. The said organisation took the task of education and opened various *makatabs*.<sup>18</sup> On 2nd May, 1932 the State issued a notification that all private schools whether religious or secular should be opened only with the permission of the Government and no outsider be employed in these schools without the permission of the Nazim in the Nizamat concerned.<sup>19</sup> In June, 1932 the State Government promulgated Registration of Societies Act under which all the societies formed before or after it were to be registered.<sup>20</sup> The meos resented the above notification and Act. On 22nd July, 1932 the police made a *lathi charge* upon Muslims (mainly Meos) at Jumma Masjid where they had assembled for prayer.<sup>21</sup> A large number of Meos (nearly 10,000) migrated from Alwar state territory to Bharatpur territory and Gurgaon, Hissar, Rewari, Nuch and Ferozepur Jhirka. The migrations began on 25th July and continued for a week. About 2500 Meos reached Delhi and claimed that they had performed *Hijrat* as a protest against non-removal of their grievances.<sup>22</sup>

The above happenings brought the Meo problem to the public notice. The Muslim organisations such as *All India Muslim League*, *Jamat-i-Tabligh-ul-Islam* and *All India Muslim Conference* gave wide publicity to the matter through press statements and representations. Thus, the economic struggle of Meos was coloured by communal politics. In addition to the economic demands communal demands were also added which included the Muslim representation in the Government service in proportion of their numerical strength in the Alwar State.

In the end of 1932 the Movement entered a new phase when the Meo leader Choudhary Yashin Khan of Gurgaon took over the leadership. He formed a Council of Action to carry on the movement systematically. The said Council launched a no-

rent campaign in the Mewat area of the Alwar State in November, 1932, to which the Meos peasantry responded firmly. The Meos adopted violent means and used physical force to fight the revenue officers and employees. When the Nazim (District Collector) of Kishangarh *Nizam* was on his way to collect land revenue on 14th November he was attacked by a group of Meos at Dhamokar Village.<sup>23</sup> The Meos blocked the roads and *Kutch* passes and they made hill bases. Around their main centres groups of watchmen were posted with drums.

The administration of the Alwar State became paralysed and it lost complete control over the *Mewat area*. The moral of the Meos was boosted by this success. On 1st December, 1932 the Maharaja issued a proclamation asking his Meo subjects to stop the unlawful activities. He also explained that due to economic depression the peasant not only of the Alwar state but also of other parts were faced with difficulty in the payment of land revenue. He further declared that a scheme of relief was under consideration according to which remission would be given where considered necessary.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly the Maharaja appointed a committee to enquire into the agrarian grievances. The said committee asked the Meo leaders to appear before the committee but they refused.<sup>25</sup>

All the above measures taken by State of Alwar failed in pacifying the revolting Meos. These measures encouraged the Meos as the State's weakness was exposed. The Meos waged a war with the State authorities. They began a guerrilla war on a large scale. They collected money, forcibly or willingly, both from Hindus and Muslims. Accordingly, the peasants of all the castes and religions were compelled by the rebellions not to pay land revenue and other taxes with the threats that if they disobeyed the orders they would be dealt with severely. The Meos committed decoity in the houses of *Banias* (money lender) on 22nd December at Kishangarh.<sup>26</sup> A large quantity of fire arms and ammunition was collected by the rebellions and they defied the state authority. They attacked the custom posts at various places and compelled the employees working there to runaway. The rebellious Meos entered the reserve forests and killed hundreds of wild animals, which was against the laws of the

State.<sup>27</sup> In January, 1933 the Meo revolt became wide spread and caused panic among the non-Meo population of Mewat. The State sent the troops to combat with Meo revolt. The State troops could not enter the hilly and thickly forested base of the rebellions and they started their operation in the plains of Lachmangarh and Govindgarh on the border of Bharatpur State. On 7th January, a group of Meo rebels attacked the State troops at Govindgarh in Lachmangarh *Nizamat* and compelled the troops to retreat. In this about 40 Meos lost their lives and hundreds were wounded.<sup>28</sup> The Meo revolt assumed a communal colour. The Meos burnt the houses and looted the property. Hindus in large numbers ran away for refuge to various neighbouring places.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the economic revolt culminated into a communal one.

The State troops failed in getting control over the Meo revolt. In the early stage the British were not worried, but when the situation worsened they decided to intervene. Moreover, they also afraid that such type revolt might also occur in the *Mewat* of Punjab. On 9th January the British troops entered the disturbed area against the wishes of the Maharaja.<sup>30</sup> The British forces continued the operation irrespective of Maharaja's non-co-operation. On 12th February 1933 the Governor-General Willingdon reported the Alwar conditions to be 'getting as bad as they can be.'<sup>31</sup> The British compelled the Maharaja to appoint British Officers and in March, 1933 an I.C.S. Officer, Mr. Wylia, was appointed as Prime Minister with the charge of Revenue Ministry.<sup>32</sup>

On 15th March, 1933 the State authorities announced some concessions to the Meos regarding land revenue and other grievances. The military and administrative measures suppressed the Meo revolt to some extent by the end of April, 1933. Though the administration passed in the hands of the British but Maharaja's presence was considered subversive. Eventually, the British decided to pack off the unpopular Maharaja to Europe on 22nd May 1933, and take over Alwar administration for some years.<sup>33</sup> In the meantime the British officers issued various orders and by the end of 1933 the Meos gave up the revolt and resumed their normal work.

The Meo revolt awakened the Meo tribe towards their right and to some extent they got their grievances redressed. In *Rabi* crop they got 50% remission in land revenue in May, 1933 and one-third permanent remission. Cesses like *Hunda Bara*, *Khad Kurcha*, *Parao* etc. were abolished. They got the right to use the *roondhs* for pasture and timber purposes and the size of the *roondhs* were gradually reduced by extending agriculture in these. In 1934 the administration of the *roondhs* passed from the forest department to the revenue department.

The above Meo revolt also developed new trends in the Meo society. The Meos who were secular in nature became rigid Muslims, although some nationalistic and radical elements tried to induce progressive ideas among them. In 1947 when communal riots occurred the Meos were the worst victim of them. It is also interesting to note that of the Muslims who migrated to Pakistan from Mewat area the number of Meos was negligible.

### III

The peasant movements in the third phase arose under the leadership of *Alwar Raj Praja Mandal*. The *Alwar Praja Mandal* was established in 1938 and raised its voice for a responsible government in the State. Its activities remained limited to the towns only. The leaders thought that they would not be able to achieve their goal without the support of the rural masses. It has been already mentioned that the conditions of peasants of Alwar were not bad in comparison with those in other States of Rajasthan. The incident of *Neemuchana* and the Meo revolt further reduced the economic burden of peasantry. The system of regular survey and settlement of land was in vogue. Under these circumstances the *Praja Mandal* had no particular issue to stir up a movement in the rural areas.

The *Praja Mandal* leaders took over the issue of Jagirs in January 1941. The Jagirdars held only 20% of land in which *Inamdars*, *Thankdars* *Muafidars* were also included. Most of these were not cultivators themselves but they rented it out to the peasants on their own terms. On 1st and 2nd June, 1941 the *Praja Mandal* organised a *Jagir Muafi Praja Conference* at

Rajgarh to discuss and highlight the problems of the peasants of Jagir and *Muafi* areas. The same Conference was attended by about 500 *Kisans*. This Conference stressed upon the demands that the peasants of Jagir and *Muafi* areas should be given *Biswadari* rights and the land revenue system be executed on the *Khalsa* lines through proper survey and settlements. All cesses and *begar* levied by the Jagirdars and *Muafidars* should be abolished which was taken mainly from Chamars, Kumhars and other servant castes<sup>34</sup>.

The above Conference organised by the *Praja Mandal* yielded adverse results. This was not the move of peasants themselves, it was initiated by an organisation which was not much acquainted with their problems. The petty Jagirdars and *Muafidars* ejected the cultivators from their holdings and they managed it either by themselves or left the land fallow. Irrespective of the regular efforts of *Praja Mandal* in the matter of Jagir—*Muafi* peasants the state did not take any action. On 2nd February, 1946 the *Praja Mandal* called a meeting at Kheda Mangal Singh in Rajgarh Tehsil. In the night of 1st February all the leaders were arrested. According to the *Hindustan Times* of 8th February, 1946 the police arrested 43 persons. Even after the arrests the meeting was held and it was attended by one thousand *Kisans*. Eventually the *Praja Mandal* movement was concentrated in Alwar town for the release of the leaders and to raise the cry for a responsible government. Jawahar Lal Nehru criticised the arrests and appointed Jai Narain Vyas to enquire into the matter. On 8th February, 1946 the *Praja Mandal* observed '*Daman Virodhi Diwas*' all over the State and on 10th February 1946 all leaders were released.

The above chapter of the peasant agitation closed in 1946 without any settlement and the State was engulfed by communal riots during the year 1947. In March 1948 the powers of the Maharaja were seized and the State merged into Matsya Union.

### BHARATPUR STATE

The conditions of peasants in the State of Bharatpur were better in comparison with the peasants of Alwar State. Here 95%

of land was under the direct control of the State known as *Khalsa*. The remaining 5% land was occupied by some state grantees including *Muafidars*. Obviously, there was no problem of Jagirdars, as in Udaipur, Jodhpur and Jaipur States. The nature of feudal system as was to be found in other states did not prevail in Bharatpur. The tenants under the Jagirdars held the same position as under the *Khalsa*. In the other States of Rajasthan Rajput was a privileged caste, but this was not the case in Bharatpur. Some have a wrong notion that Jats were a privileged caste in the Bharatpur State as the ruling family was Jat. In fact the five major castes viz. Brahmin, Jat, Gujar, Ahir and Meos enjoyed more or less same status and privileges as the Jats.

In the Bharatpur State *Lamberdari* or *Patelai* system existed under which the *Lamberdars* or Patels (headmen of the villages) were responsible for the collection of the land revenue. They were entitled for cesses, concessional and rent free lands.

The peasant movement of Bharatpur State had similarity with the Alwar movement. Here also the peasant movement was divided in three phases viz. spontaneous peasant movement under the leadership of *Patels* and *lamberdars*, the agitation of the Meo peasantry, and movement under the *Bharatpur Praja Parishad* and other organisations.

## I

In the year 1931 a new settlement of land was enforced under which the land revenue was 1/3 of the produce. In addition to the land revenue *Abiana* (Irrigation) tax, *Malba*, *Patwar*, *haq patel* etc. cesses also remained in practice. A new tax for the public utility services such as education, health, roads etc. was imposed which was to be charged at the rate of 3% on the amount of land revenue.<sup>35</sup> The new settlement created discontentment and unrest among the peasants. Without going into details it may be said that the worldwide depression also caused hardships to the peasantry. The *Lambardars* and *Patels* were facing difficulty in collecting the land revenue as the peasants were unable to pay their dues under new excessive land revenue system enforced in 1931. The village headmen who were the part of the State authority himself came forward to fight the issue of increase

in land revenue. A group of headmen toured various villages to mobilize the cultivators for a no-rent campaign to express opposition to the new rates of land revenue.<sup>36</sup>

The cultivators submitted various petition early in the November of 1931 for reduction of land revenue. When the state took no notice nearly 500 peasants from different tehsils assembled at Bharatpur on 23rd November, 1931 under the leadership of Bhoji *Lambardar*.<sup>37</sup> A meeting was held before the office of the State Council which was addressed by Bhoji *Lambardar*, and he urged the peasants not to pay land revenue—neither at the new rates nor according to the old. He openly called the peasants to raise subscription to fight out their cases.<sup>38</sup> This provoking speech compelled the State to arrest Bhoji *Lambardar*. He was arrested on 24th November, 1931 and sentenced to 9 months imprisonment with a fine of Rs. 25/-.<sup>39</sup>

This brought the movement to an end, but the movement did succeed in preventing the State from executing the new settlement for a long time. The movement could not survive because it was in the hands of those who were not peasants themselves. The liberal policy of appeasement adopted by the State towards *Lambardars* and *Patels* was another factor which weakened this movement.

## II

Under the influence of the Meo revolt of Alwar the Meos of Bharatpur State also came in direct confrontation with the authorities. In the tehsils of Nagar and Pahari adjoining Alwar the Meos constituted a major part of the population. They had family and clan links with the Meos of Alwar. When the Meos of Alwar revolted they got all type of support from the Meos of Bharatpur. In March and April, 1933 the State of Alwar granted liberal concessions to the Meos. When Alwar State granted many concession the Meos of Bharatpur also began to aspire for similar concessions.

The State authorities of Bharatpur were vigilant during the revolt of the Alwar Meos. The Meo *Lambardars* of Nagar and Pahari were warned by the President of the Bharatpur Council to

keep themselves aloof from that revolt. The President's warning did not prevent them from involving themselves in the affairs of the Alwar Meos. Following the firing at Govindgarh on 7th January, 1933 the Meos of Nagar and Pahari became turbulent as they were much affected by this incident. When the demands relating to the Rabi crop were communicated to the villages in March 1933, the *Numberdars* (village headmen) of Semla Kallan in Nagar and Ladmka and Papra in Pahari along with some closely allied villages did not accept the orders issued to them on the ground that it was beyond their paying capacity.<sup>40</sup>

The *Numberdars* of the above villages organised *Panchayats* in other villages in which it was decided that other Meo villages should also be asked to withhold payment on the pain of ex-communication and where this threat failed the other *Zamindars* (peasants) should be intimidated. The result had been that the majority of villages in Nagar and Pahari refused to pay the land revenue. The Meos joined the no-rent campaign willingly but others were forced. Since all the Meo *Numberdars* (who were part of the revenue system) were in favour of non-payment of land revenue, it was not possible to collect the dues. In fact all the non-Meo peasants were also watching this confrontation. They knew that in case some concessions were given to these villages they would also get the same and this made the non-rent campaign a wide-spread movement. In a village Jitra Hedi in Nagar *Tehsil* the Gujar *Lambardars* were beaten by the Meo *Lambardars*, because the former accepted the orders of the demand.<sup>41</sup>

The collection of land revenue in the villages of Nagar and Pahari *tehsils* could not be made. The last date fixed for the collection was 31st May and the results upto 27th May 1933 were as follows.<sup>42</sup>

<i>Tehsils</i>	<i>Land Revenue (in Rs )</i>	<i>Realised (in Rs.)</i>	<i>Balance (in Rs.)</i>
Pahari	94 108	21,075	73,033
Nagar	86,957	32,685	54,272
Total	1,81,065	53,760	1,27,305
Others Total	6,61,434	6,50,218	11,216



The above figures show that the collection of land revenue from Pahari and Nagar *tehsils* was negligible in comparison with the other *tehsils* of Bharatpur. The State in the end granted some concessions in custom duties and *Abiana* tax and the last date was extended upto 10th June, 1933. This also did not bring the situation under control.

The State Government included a muslim member in the State Council to pacify the Meos. Khan Bahadur Qazi Azizuddin Bilgrami, Additional District Magistrate, Agra, joined on the 16th June 1933 as the Police and Education Member of the State Council of Bharatpur.<sup>43</sup> A Council meeting was held on the same day at which the whole Meo situation was discussed and an ordinance was drawn up in which it was stipulated that any person who refused the payment of land revenue or made propaganda against the payment of land revenue would be liable to imprisonment.<sup>44</sup> The same translated into Hindi was distributed among the disturbed villages. However, this did not improve the situation.

On 19th June, 1933 in the morning the village Semla Kalan and the neighbouring village of Jhitraheri were surrounded by the two companies of the infantry.<sup>45</sup> The Alwar, Bharatpur and Gurgaon borders were sealed by the forces which had been stationed in the Alwar territory. By the end of July, 1933 the revenue was collected by force from the villages of Semla Kalan and Jhitraheri and the no-rent campaign was crushed. The said forces then entered in the villages of Ladmka and Papra in the Pahari Tehsil and by the end of December 1933 the forces successfully collected the land revenue. The action of the forces terrorised the whole area and the revenue officials were able to collect the revenue easily.

In 1934 a special committee was formed under Mr. Bilgrami to enquire into the Meo trouble. The said committee presented the report and some concessions in addition to land revenue and taxes regarding their social and religious grievances were also granted. In 1936 the land revenue settlement was to be revised. The Agent to Governor-General in Rajputana made the following suggestion : "In my opinion it is of the utmost importance that when the question is being investigated, special attention should

be paid to the recent revised settlement in the Alwar state and that the revenue rates in Bharatpur should not display any marked disparity with those in Alwar. Both States have a large Meo population closely interconnected by caste and clan ties and any striking difference in the treatment of agriculturists in the two states is certain to lead to political agitation and agrarian trouble in Bharatpur.<sup>46</sup>

### III

The agitations of 1931 and 1933 resulted in lessening the land revenue and other taxes all over Bharatpur State. Thus the discontentment resulting from the settlement of 1931 was checked and the situation normalised. There was no other major issue to build up a peasant agitation. It was only in 1947 that a new movement appeared on the scene.

In January, 1947 a *begar virodhi* movement was launched by the *Bharatpur Praja Parishad*, *Lal Jhanda Kisan Sabha* and *Muslim Conference*. On 4th January the Governor-General Wavell and Bikaner Maharaja Sadul Singh reached Bharatpur for duck shooting at *Keoladeo Ghana* (Bird sanctuary). A large number of *Chamars*, *Kolis*, *Khatiks*, *Bhangis* etc. from the adjoining villages were brought for *begar* to assist the V.I.P.'s in their hunting game.<sup>47</sup> The *Praja Parishad* initiated opposition of the above happenings and in a demonstration they raised the slogan "Wavell go back". On 5th January, 1947 the above opposition was converted into an anti *begar* movement and the *Lal Jhanda Kisan Sabha* and Muslim Conference joined the movement. On the same day the leaders sat on *Dharna* in front of the main gate of the Bharatpur fort. The State sent troops under the command of Bachchu Singh (younger brother of Maharaja) he beat the leaders who were on *dharna*. No casualty took place but prominent leaders like Raj Bahadur Sanwal Prasad Choube and his wife, Munshi Ali Muhammad and Mukut Bihari were badly wounded.<sup>48</sup>

On 6th January 1947 the agitating bodies organised *begar virodhi diwas* all over the State. To defame the movement the government supporters looted Kumher and Uchchain towns. The same day Ramesh Swami of Bhusawar was killed by a thanedar by

running a bus over him. This movement continued upto September 1947 and was withdrawn by the *Praja Parishad* as the process of integration of Bharatpur State was started. On 18th March 1948 the State of Bharatpur merged into the Matsya Union.

It may be concluded the peasant movement in the States of Bharatpur and Alwar arose very late but proved very powerful. The Meos who were semi-tribal people came out of the age-old darkness. These movements provided a base for the movement for a responsible government in both the States. An upshot of these radical movements was that both the States were among the first ones to become free from Feudal and colonial rule in Rajasthan.

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## CONCLUSION

The British paramountcy in Rajasthan brought some historical changes. The Rajasthani rulers who had been subordinates to the Mughals or semi-autonomous became puppets in the hands of the British. They discarded their responsibility towards the masses and became responsible to their British masters.

It is a well known fact that imperialism can only thrive alongside feudalism. The British on the one hand destroyed the Indian traditional feudal order and, on the other, feudalism was protected in a changed shape which can be explained as semi-feudalism. But in Rajasthan the medieval feudal system was maintained in its crude form. The Rajasthani rulers and Jagirdars tried their best to appease the British as their very existence was due to them. They looted their masses to fulfil their obligations to their imperial masters and to satisfy their extravagancy. Since land revenue was the main source of their income, the peasant became the prime victim of the imperial and feudal alliance.

The tribals and peasants had resisted the new system ever since the establishment of the British paramountcy. The Bhils were the first to rebel against feudal and imperial order. In 1818, and again in the years 1881-1883 the Bhils of Udaipur revolted for their forest and land rights. These revolts of ignorant tribals were crushed by the authorities.

The tribal revolts of late 19th century were a source of inspiration to them. In the beginning of the 20th century a social reform movement was launched by Govindgir among the Bhils of Dungarpur and Banswara States. In the course of time this social

reform movement culminated into a powerful revolt. The Bhil revolt under the leadership of Govindgir was crushed by the British with the help of military forces. Though the revolt failed but it left a deep impact. The Bhils came out of the age-old darkness. Not only this but the Bhils also achieved their traditional forest rights to some extent. This revolt became a prime source of inspiration to the downtrodden classes. The revolt also became the base of peasant movement and freedom struggle in Rajasthan.

In the history of the peasant movements in Rajasthan the Bijolia (Udaipur State) movement was the first organised movement. The peasant movement of Bijolia arose under the spell and in the wake of social reforms, and caste *panchayat* played an important role in the early phase of this movement. The Dhakar (Caste) peasants of Bijolia in the efforts for social reforms reached the conclusion that the main cause of their backwardness was the prevailing socio-economic system. They were deprived of the land rights by the Jagirdars. The burden of land revenue and cesses (*Lag-bag*) was very heavy. The intensity of the peasants' burden can be gauged from the fact that they were deprived of 87% of their gross produce. Apart from the economic burden the peasants were also forced to perform *begar*. The peasants were suffering severely under excessive feudal exploitation. This movement can be divided into three phases. In its first phase, from 1897-1915, it was a spontaneous movement, while in its second phase between 1915-1923 the movement reached its climax. The caste *panchayat* which guided the movement during first phase culminated into a peasant organisation known as *Kisan Panchayat* during the second phase. The leaders tried their best to get the support of the Indian National Congress but the Congress did not extend its support. But the movement was so militant that the peasants succeeded in getting some grievances redressed under the agreement of 1922.

The agreement concluded between *Kisan Panchayat* and Bijolia *thakur* in 1922 could not be implemented upto 1923 due to the devious methods adopted by the *thakur*. But the second phase was so powerful that it engulfed the whole of Udaipur State and some parts of the surrounding States. However, by 1927 the

movement was crushed with the help of military forces. Then the peasants adopted a passive method of protest and they surrendered their holdings to the *thikana*.

The peasants were of the view that their surrendered land would be a problem for the *thikana*. Though the *thikana* tried to allot the surrendered lands to other peasants on concessional rates but could not succeed. However, by the end of 1930 about 8,000 bigha of surrendered land was allotted by the *thikana* to the *Maharajans* who were mainly money-lenders.

The impact of the Bijolia movement was Rajasthan-wide but after 1930 the movement got weakened due to differences among the leaders. After 1930 the main object of the movement was to get the surrendered land back. The movement could not attain its ultimate goal but it did play an important role in infusing anti-feudal consciousness among the peasants of Rajasthan.

Under the influence of the peasant uprisings of Bijolia, Begun and the *Khalsa* area of Udaipur State the Bhils also arose under the leadership of Motilal Tejawat. This movement was also influenced by the Non-Cooperation Movement launched by the Indian National Congress. The tribals of Udaipur and Sirohi states remained turbulent during 1921-23. This movement was not owned by the Indian National Congress due to its class character. Although this movement could not be integrated in the national movement, yet it strengthened the national cause.

*Rajasthan Seva Sangh's* activities and the Bijolia movement inspired the mass movement in Jodhpur State. The peasant movement of Jodhpur State arose in a different manner as compared to the other movements. In most of the States of Rajasthan the peasants arose spontaneously or organised themselves. But in Jodhpur State the urban and educated modern middle class elements organised the peasant movement.

In 1920 an organisation known as *Marwar Seva Sangh* came into being which remained active upto 1922. In 1923 *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* was constituted which was simply *Marwar Seva Sangh* functioning under a new name to confuse the State authorities. During 1923-24 the *Sabha* remained active in the rural areas and widen its social base. The growing popularity of the *Sabha*



alarmed the State authorities and an organisation known as *Raj Bhakta Desh Hitkarni Sabha* came into being in 1924 with the support of State.

The *Marwar Hitkarni Sabha* launched a peasant agitation between 1925-1931 but it did not achieve much success. It took up the issues of land rights, heavy land revenue, *Lag-bag*, *begar*, etc. These issues agitated the peasant masses and created anti-feudal consciousness among them. In 1938 the *Marwar Lok Parishad* was established in which a sizable number of rural element was included. The *Parishad* launched a peasant movement with great vigour. In addition to the State machinery the Jagirdars Association attacked the *Parishad*. In 1941 the State authorities also succeeded in establishing *Marwar Kisan Sabha* with the help of Baldeo Ram Mirdha, a police officer. The *Kisan Sabha* appealed to the peasants not to support the *Marwar Lok Parishad*. But by this time the *Parishad* had firmly established itself as a real mass organisation. The situation compelled the *Kisan Sabha* to co-operate with the *Lok Parishad* and during 1946-1948 both the organisations launched a joint movement. In 1948 both the organisations formed a popular interim government and the Marwar Tenancy Act was passed in which the peasants were given occupancy rights.

The conditions of peasants were much worse in Jagir areas in comparison with those in the *Khalsa*. In Shekhawati area of Jaipur State the whole of the land was under the possession of Jagirdars. The Shekhawati peasant movement began in 1921 and continued up to 1940, which was a unique achievement.

Most of the leading Marwari capitalists such as Birlas, Dalmias, Taparias, Modis, Todis, Poddars etc. belonged to the Shekhawati area. They had money but in the feudal dominated area of Shekhawati their position was very low. They wanted to buildup their political and social base in the region. The *Chirawa Seva Samiti* was an organisation supported by the capitalists and through it they were reaching the peasantry. The *Samiti* launched an agitation in 1921 which was crushed by *Raja* of Khetri. In fact, this movement was not an agrarian movement but it created a new consciousness among the peasants. The capitalists of

Shekhawati were in the background of the peasant movement of the region.

The peasant movements which arose in different areas of Shekhawati during 1923-33 were spontaneous and unorganised. In February 1934 the Jat cultivators who were in the majority held a *Mahayagya* in Sikar to unite all the scattered movements. During the years 1934-35 the peasant movement in Shekhawati was in full vigour which alarmed the Jagirdars. The Jagirdars took exception of it and a series of attacks were let loose upon the peasants through their hirelings. By the end of 1936 the peasants got their grievances reduced to some extent.

The peasant movement of Shekhawati prepared the ground for the *Praja Mandal* movement in Jaipur State. Though the *Praja Mandal* weakened the peasant movements but it became a real mass movement against feudal and colonial rule.

Some isolated peasant agitations were also witnessed in the *Nizamats* of Hindaun and Torawati of Jaipur State in 1939 under the leadership of *Praja Mandal* activists. Another movement was that of the Bairwa Cultivators which was launched in 1946 in *Uniara thikana* by the All India State People *Bairwa Mahasabha*.

In the history of the peasant movements of Rajasthan the peasant movement in Alwar and Bharatpur States have an important place. In 1925 the Rajput cultivators of Neemuchana protested against the enhancement of land revenue, but their protest was crushed with the help of army by the authorities of Alwar State. The above action of the State created terror among the peasantry.

The Meo peasantry of Alwar State came into open rebellion in the year 1932-33; the movement got a communal colour later on. It was also put down by the army.

During 1938-1947 some isolated peasant agitations were launched by the *Alwar Praja Mandal*. There were directed against the Jagirdars, *Imandars*, *Muafidars* etc. Their main demands were related to land rights for the peasantry. On 2nd February 1946 a public meeting was called by the *Praja Mandal* leaders at Kheda Mangal Singh, a village in Rajgarh Tehsil. All the leaders were arrested on 1st February by the State Police. After this incident the movement got confined to Alwar town with the release of its leaders as its main demand.

The conditions of the peasantry were better in the State of Bharatpur in comparison with those obtaining in the other states of Rajasthan. 95% of land was under the *Khalsa* area. In 1931 the new land settlement created trouble for peasants and intermediaries. The *Patels* and *Lumbardars* who were responsible for the collection of land revenue faced problems in collecting land revenue on increased rates of 1931. They themselves instigated the peasants not to pay the land revenue. The State authorities adopted the policy of appeasement towards the *Patels* and *Lumbardars*. Obviously, the movement came to an end.

Under the influence of the Meo revolts in Alwar State, the Meos of Bharatpur also arose in 1932. This was also an agrarian movement and like the Alwar movement, this too took a communal colour. To satisfy the Meos the State Government included a Muslim member in the State Council on 16th June, 1933. But this did not improve the situation. On 19th June, 1933 military operations began in the troubled villages. By the end of 1933 the forces not only crushed the movement but land revenue due from the Meo peasants was also collected. In 1934 a special committee was formed under qazi Azizuddin Bilgrami (Member of State Council) to enquire into the Meo grievances.

The peasant agitations of 1931 and 1933 influenced the land revenue policy of Bharatpur State. In the settlement of 1936 the peasant's grievances were taken into consideration. Obviously, there was no major issue left for a new peasant movement. In January 1947 the *Bharatpur Praja Parishad* launched *begar Virodhi* movement. On 4th January, 1947 the Governor-General Wavell and Bikaner Maharaja Sadul Singh reached Bharatpur for hunting. A large number of people were brought on *begar* to assist them. People protested against this and "Wavell, go back" slogan was raised by the *Praja Parishad*. This incident gave birth to a State-wide *beggar virodhi* movement which was later joined by *Lal Jhanda Kisan Sabha* and Muslim conference. This movement continued upto September, 1947.

The peasant movements in Rajasthan during 1931-38 were in full swing. This was the period when the British India witnessed no major mass movement. Rajasthan remained the centre of anti-feudal movements during 1920-1938. Though these

movements were not directly linked with the national organisations but these were influenced by them. The Indian National Congress did not own these movements. It was only in 1938 that the Congress supported the freedom movement of the princely states.

The peasant movements in Rajasthan were mostly spontaneous but in due course they developed into highly organised movements. They also paved the way for the freedom struggle in Rajasthan and threw an open challenge to the centuries old feudalism, thereby also providing a base for the much needed social reforms.

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